NATION

Article 21 soul of Constitution, liberty of citizen paramount: SC

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BUSINESS

WTO talks end without decision on agri, fisheries subsidies

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SPORTS

Mumbai Indians pummel Royal Challengers by 7 wickets

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Modi, Shah in first BJP list of 195 candidates for LS polls

Narendra Modi to contest from Varanasi, Sadhvi Pragya dropped

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will contest from Varanasi for a third time as BJP released its first list of 195 candidates for the Lok Sabha polls. It named 34 Union ministers, including heavyweights like Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh from their current Gandhinagar and Lucknow seats respectively.

Two former chief ministers -- Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Biplab Kumar Deb -- also figure in the list. In Delhi four sitting MPs including Union minister Meenakshi Lekhi, former Union minister Harsh Vardhan and Ramesh Bidhuri have been dropped.

Bidhuri was recently in the news for his controversial comments against Opposition MP Danish Ali. BJP has also dropped Sadhvi Pragya Thakur from Bhopal and Union Ministers John Barla, Meenakshi Lekhi and Rameswar Teli their constituencies.

The list of candidates for the 195 constituencies included 155 seats BJP had won in the 2019 polls. BJP has dropped over 20 per cent of its MPs.

Jyotiraditya Scindia will contest from Guna, Sarbananda Sonowal from Dibrugarh, Bhupender Yadav from Alwar, Rajeev Chandrashekhar from Thiruvananthapuram, V Muraleedharan Parshottam Rupala from Rajkot and Mansukh Mandaviya from Porbandar.

The list includes 28 women, 47 people below 50 years of age, 27 from Scheduled Castes, 18 from Scheduled Tribes and 57 from Other Backward Classes.

The first list has 51 seats from Uttar Pradesh, 24 from Madhya Pradesh, 20 from West Bengal, 15 each from Gujarat and Rajasthan, 12 from Kerala, nine from Telangana, 11 each from Assam, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, five from Delhi, three from Uttarakhand, two each from Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir,

BJP leaders Baijayant Jay Panda, Vinod Tawde during the announcement of first list of candidates **PHOTO: PTI**

and one each from Goa, Tripura, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Daman and Diu.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will fight again from Kota in Rajasthan and Shivraj Singh Chouhan returns to his former parliamentary constituency Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh, which he represented for five terms before taking over as the state's chief minister in 2005.

Union ministers Smriti Irani, who will fight from Amethi again, Jitendra Singh, Sarbananda Sonowal, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, G Kishan Reddy, Kiren Rijiju, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Arjun Ram Meghwal and Arjun Munda also figure in the list.

Bhopal MP Sadhvi Pragya Thakur, whose controversial utterances have drawn flak several times, has been dropped.

Bansuri Swaraj, the daughter of the late BJP stalwart Sushma Swaraj, will make her poll debut from the New Delhi seat, replacing Lekhi.

Manoj Tiwari is the only sitting MP from the national capital who has been retained.

Bhojpuri singer and actor Pawan Singh has been fielded from Asansol in West Bengal, currently represented by TMC leader and actor-politician Shatrughan Sinha.

In UP, the party has fielded former BSP MP Ritesh Pandey from Ambedkar Nagar, while Hema Malini, Ravi Kishan, Ajay Mishra Teni, Mahesh Sharma, SPS Baghel and Sakshi Maharaj are among those being repeated from their seats.

In Jharkhand, former Congress MP Geeta Kora has been fielded from Singhbhum (ST reserved).

Another round of BJP's central election committee meeting for elections will be held on 5, 6, and 7 March to finalise candidates' names for the rest of the seats. *—PTI/ ANI*

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Covid vaccine is not responsible for heart attacks: Min

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has said ICMR has done a detailed study which shows that the Covid-19 vaccine is not responsible for heart attacks, and an individual's lifestyle and factors such as binge drinking could be among the underlying causes. Mandaviya talked of India's efforts to supply Covid-19 vaccines to around 150 countries in the world and said that it has generated enormous goodwill in those countries. "If someone has a stroke today, some people think it is because of the Covid vaccine. ICMR has done a detailed study on this. (Covid) vaccine is not responsible for heart attacks. There are multiple reasons for heart attacks, like our lifestyle, tobacco, and excess liquor consumption... Sometimes, misinformation goes among the people and a perception is formed for some time. But whatever decision we make, it should be data-based and scientific research-based," Mandaviya said. *—ANI*

Spanish woman gang-raped in J'khand, 3 arrested

DUMKA, 2 MARCH

A woman from Spain was allegedly gang-raped in Jharkhand's Dumka district, police said on Saturday. Three people have been arrested in connection with the incident and a manhunt has been launched to nab the remaining accused, they said. The incident took place at Kurumahat in Hansdiha police station area, around 300km from state capital Ranchi, on Friday night when a tourist couple from Spain was spending the night at a makeshift tent. The couple had reached Dumka from Bangladesh on a two-wheeler and was en route to Bihar and then Nepal. *—PTI*

Google restores Indian apps after intervention

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Google has reinstated some Indian apps it had removed from its Play Store, including Naukri and 99acres, amid the government's clear signal that the delisting of Indian apps cannot be permitted. Sources said reinstating some of the apps was not linked to the government's position but with the concerned apps complying with the Play Store Billing policies. Taking a strong view of Google pulling out some apps from its Play Store, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the delisting of Indian apps cannot be permitted government will meet Google and app developers, who have been delisted, next week to resolve the dispute. *—PTI*

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UP govt cancels RO/ARO exam over paper leak

LUCKNOW, 2 MARCH

Following reports of a paper leak, the Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday cancelled the preliminary exam conducted on 11 February for the recruitment of Review Officers and Assistant Review Officers. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed that the exam be conducted again within six months. The Special Task Force (STF) of the Uttar Pradesh Police has been tasked to investigate the matter of the paper leak. Adityanath has directed to cancel the exam of Review Officers and Assistant Review Officers held by the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission on 11 February."*—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bihar Governor Rajendra Arlekar and others during the inauguration and foundation stone laying ceremony of various development projects, in Begusarai on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

PM unveils oil, gas projects worth ₹1.62 lakh crore

KRISHNANAGAR/ BEGUSARAI, 2 MARCH

- Modi dedicated to the nation the First Oil from KG Basin and flagged off the first crude oil tanker from the ONGC Krishna Godavari deep-water project and said these would boost self-reliance in the oil and gas sector

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday unveiled a series of oil and gas sector projects worth about Rs 1.62 lakh crore across the country from Bihar's Begusarai district.

The projects are spread across various states like Bihar, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab and Karnataka.

Modi asserted that the development projects, which were unveiled during the day, would help make India the third-largest economic power in the world, and pave the way for the prosperity of Bihar.

Modi dedicated to the nation the First Oil from KG Basin and flagged off the first crude oil tanker from the ONGC Krishna Godavari deep-water project and said these would boost self-reliance in the oil and gas sector.

He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for several railway projects worth about Rs 3,917 crore. He dedicated to the nation 'Bharat Pashudhan' - a digital database for livestock animals in the country.

'Bharat Pashudhan' will empower farmers by providing them with a traceability system for bovines and also help in disease monitoring and control.

Modi also launched the '1962 Farmers App' for records of all data and information present under 'Bharat Pashudhan' database, which can be utilised by farmers.

Modi sets target for Bengal BJP to win all 42 LS seats

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday stepped up the attack against Mamata Banerjee government, labelling it as being synonymous with "oppression, dynasty politics, and betrayal" and claimed that TMC has achieved a "mastery" in turning schemes into scams.

Speaking at a rally in Krishnanagar in Nadia district, Modi outlined an ambitious target for BJP to win all the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state, emphasising the correlation between West Bengal's progress and that of the nation. In the 2019 general elections, BJP had bagged 18 seats in the state.

—PTI

Cong will provide MSP to farmers 'legally': RaGa

BHOPAL, 2 MARCH

Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said his party would provide Minimum Support Price (MSP) to farmers legally if it came to power, and accused BJP-led Union government of ignoring farmers' interests while working for big industrialists.

Speaking in Morena after his 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' entered Madhya Pradesh from Rajasthan, he also reiterated the demand for caste census and claimed that 73 per cent of the country's population has no presence in most sectors of the economy as well as in the top levels of bureaucracy.

He later addressed a gathering in Gwalior where he said conducting a caste-based census will be the first task INDIA bloc government will undertake after coming to power at the Centre. The level of unemployment is at the highest level in 40 years, Gandhi claimed, adding that unemployment in the country is double that of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

BJP government at the Centre has waived loans of Rs 16 lakh crore of ten to fifteen industrialists but it is denying (legally guaranteed) MSP to farmers, he alleged.

Farmer organisations in Punjab and Haryana are currently agitating for legally guaranteed MSP for crops.

Farmers are only asking for MSP and the right price for their produce and hard work, but when crops get ready for harvest, Union government changes its import-export policy to bring down the prices of agricultural commodities, he alleged.

"This change forces farmers to sell their produce at a lower price and then the government again increases rates (by changing the policy)," Gandhi said.

Earlier in the afternoon, MP Congress president Jitu Patwari welcomed Gandhi and senior party leader Ashok Gehlot on the border of Morena district. The Yatra resumed from Dholpur in Rajasthan in the morning after a five-day break and is scheduled to reach Gwalior at night.

—PTI

AI firms need govt nod to launch products

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Days after Google's AI platform's response to queries on Prime Minister Narendra Modi generated controversy, the government has issued an advisory for social media and other platforms to label under-trial AI models and prevent hosting unlawful content.

In an advisory issued to intermediaries/platforms on 1 March, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology warned of criminal action in case of non-compliance.

"All intermediaries or platforms to ensure that use of Artificial Intelligence model(s) / LLM/Generative AI, software(s) or algorithm(s) on or through its computer resource does not permit its users to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share any unlawful content," the advisory said.

The response of Gemini to queries about Modi led to a strong reaction from the government, with Minister of State for IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar calling it a violation of IT laws. *—PTI*

BENGALURU BOMB BLAST

Karnataka Chief Miniter Siddaramaiah meets the injured of Rameshwaram Cafe blast, in Bengaluru **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Siddaramaiah says, will nab culprits soon

BENGALURU/MYSURU, 2 MARCH

The police on Saturday intensified its probe into the 1 March bomb blast at a City eatery that left 10 injured, as the Karnataka government expressed confidence that those behind the incident will be nabbed at the earliest based on CCTV images but said it was not possible to specify at the moment if any outfit was involved in the incident. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah convened a meeting of the Home department to take stock of the situation, during which he instructed senior police officers to leverage technology effectively in investigation and ensure that the "full truth" of the incident comes out.

Brookfield outlet to reopen on 8 March

The Brookfield outlet of The Rameshwaram Cafe where a low intensity blast occurred on Friday leaving 10 people injured will be reopened on 8 March, said the co-founder and CEO of the popular city eatery.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 2

Delhi Police on alert after blast in Bengaluru café

New Delhi, 2 March

The Delhi Police has stepped up security after a blast at Rameshwaram Cafe, an official said on Saturday. Districts police chiefs have been directed to increase vigil in crowded areas, especially in Delhi's markets, the official said. A senior police officer said market associations have been asked to remain alert and approach their local police stations in case they find any suspicious activity. *—PTI*

2 Bilkis convicts move SC for remission

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Two of the 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano case have moved Supreme Court contending that its 8 January verdict cancelling remission of their sentence was "in teeth of" a 2002 constitution bench order and sought the issue to be referred to a larger bench for "final" adjudication.

Radheyshaym Bhagwandas Shah and Rajubhai Babulal Soni, both lodged in Godhra sub-jail after the apex court verdict, said an "anomalous" situation has arisen wherein two different coordinate benches (benches of same strength) have taken diametrically opposite view on the same issue of premature release as well as on which policy of the state government would be applicable to the petitioners for remission.

The plea, filed through advocate Rishi Malhotra, said while one bench on 13 May, 2022 categorically ordered the Gujarat government to consider the application of Shah for premature release in terms of the state government's remission policy of 9 July, 1992, the bench that pronounced the verdict on 8 January concluded that it was Maharashtra and not the Gujarat government that was competent to grant remission. Shah has also filed an application for bail.

—PTI

AMID STRAINED TIES

India stops 'nuke' cargo ship from China to Pak

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

Security agencies at Mumbai's Nhava Sheva port intercepted and seized the consignment of a Karachi-bound ship from China after it was found carrying a dual-use consignment with implications for Pakistan's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, officials said on Saturday.

Customs officials, acting on intelligence, halted Malta-flagged merchant ship -- CMA CGM Attila -- en route to Karachi on 23 January and, during its inspection, found that the consignment had a Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine, manufactured by an Italian company, known for its precision and efficiency controlled by a computer system.

A Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) team examined the consignment and confirmed its potential usage in Pakistan's nuclear initiatives, notably in manufacturing crucial components for missile development.

CNC machines fall under Wassenaar Arrangement, an international arms control regime aimed at curbing the spread of items with dual civilian and military applications, in which India is an active participant. CNC machine was used by North Korea in its nuclear programme.

(DRDO) team examined the consignment and confirmed its potential usage in Pakistan's nuclear initiatives **PHOTO: X**

The ongoing probe aims to ascertain if the suspected Pakistani entities receiving these items are linked to Defence Science and Technology Organisation, responsible for Pakistan's defence research and development.

The officials said China's assistance to Pakistan has come in two ways -- supplying sensitive materials or equipment of proliferation concern clandestinely and acting as a conduit in facilitating the country to procure dual-use military-grade items from overseas, especially Europe and the US.

—PTI

Nejaru murder trial to begin on 7 March

UDUPI, 2 MAR

Udupi District and Sessions Court has ordered the authorities at the Parappana Agrahara jail to produce Praveen Chowgule, the prime suspect in the murder of four family members in Nejaru near Brahmavar in November last. The accused is mandated to appear for the hearing in the case scheduled on 7 March, as directed by the court. Chowgule's apprehension swiftly followed the brutal murders that occurred on November 12 last year. Since then, he has been held in judicial custody at Bengaluru's Parappana Agrahara jail. In February this year, law enforcement officials filed a detailed charge sheet pertaining to the case, shedding light on the motives behind Chowgule's alleged actions. The investigation highlighted his tumultuous relationship with Aynaz Mohammed, 21, a trainee air hostess and former colleague. The motive, as outlined by the police, underscores Chowgule's possessive nature and the discord in his relationship with Aynaz Mohammed. The victims of this heinous attack included Aynaz's mother, Haseena, 47, her elder sister, Afnan, 23, and younger brother, Aseem, 14.According to police, when Chowgule launched his assault on Aynaz, the other three victims were also present in the house and came under attack. In a twist of fate, Haseena's mother-in-law, Hakira, was attacked but managed to survive by seeking refuge in a bathroom.

—PTI

Key conspirator in RSS leader's murder held from Mumbai

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

National Investigation Agency has arrested a PFI member, who was allegedly the key conspirator in an eight-year-old murder case of Bengaluru-based RSS leader R Rudresh, from Mumbai airport on his return from abroad. Ghouse Nayazi, who was on the run since 2016, was arrested by a special team at Mumbai International Airport on Friday soon after his arrival from Dar-e-Salaam, Tanzania, a spokesperson of the federal agency said.Rudresh, a prominent RSS leader of Shivajinagar in Bengaluru, was hacked to death by four members of the now-banned Popular Front of India (PFI) in Karnataka on 16 October, 2016.The spokesperson said investigations into the case had revealed that the murder was part of a larger conspiracy hatched by Nayazi, president of the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), Hebbal Assembly constituency, and one Asim Sheriff."The duo had persuaded the other four accused to kill Rudresh with an intention to strike terror among the members of the RSS and the society. The killers were made to believe that the fight against the RSS was a holy war," the official said.With the arrest of Nayazi, all the accused in the case have been arrested. The trial against the other accused is going on in the NIA Special Court, Bengaluru.

—PTI

Record collection at Mahadeshwara Swamy temple

C'NAGAR, 2 MAR

A staggering sum of Rs 1.82 crore was tallied during the 28-day Hundi money counting event conducted at Sri Male Mahadeshwara Swamy temple in Hanur taluk in Chamarajanagar on Friday. Raghu, the secretary of the temple, said, "The Hundis were ceremoniously opened in the presence of Shanta Mallikarjuna Swami of Saluru Brihan Mutt at 8am on Friday at the commercial complex near bus stand. The counting process continued until 7.40pm, revealing a remarkable collection of Rs 1,82,33,071."

—Salar News

RAMESWARAM CAFE BLAST

All angles are being probed: Shivakumar

There is possible link between 2022 Mangaluru cooker blast & Bengaluru explosion: Deputy CM

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said there seems to be a link between the blast at Rameshwaram Cafe, and the cooker explosion that took place in the coastal city of Mangaluru in 2022.

He said the government is committed to a fair probe, and police have been given a free hand to investigate the incident at the quick-service eatery in Brookefield in the information technology corridor in east Bengaluru that left 10 people injured.

He said police officers from Mangaluru and Shivamogga too have come here, and all angles are being looked into.

"There is no reason for Bengalureans to worry; it was a low-intensity blast, it was prepared locally... but the sound was big. The culprit's face is visible from all angles despite him wearing a cap and specs. From three-four angles, he is seen. Cameras have captured him walking too," added Shivakumar, who is also Bengaluru City Development Minister.

In Mangaluru, an improvised explosive device (IED) kept inside a pressure cooker accidentally went off when it was being taken in an auto rickshaw in November, 2022. A probe into the blast had revealed that the IED was meant to be planted at the Kadri Manjunatha temple. Investigators had found that the Mangaluru cooker blast was "Islamic State-sponsored" and had the involvement of a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operative.

DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: ANI*

Shivakumar, also State Congress chief, said. "Central Crime Branch (CCB) is investigating and they have formed 7-8 teams. There are cameras everywhere in Bengaluru City."

"He (suspect) has come by bus, how did he go back is being traced. You (media) too have got clippings which are being telecast."

Noting that the government is serious about probing the blast incident and there is no question of sparing anyone, the Deputy CM said it is a matter of State's pride. Let BJP say whatever they want and do anything "We are least bothered about it."

"If they (BJP) offer constructive cooperation, okay, if they want to do politics, let them," he said. With regards to the treatment of the injured, Shivakumar said already instructions have been given to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Joint Commissioner and "we will take care of their bills." *—PTI*

Tracing Suspect's Journey

11:30am on 1 March: Suspect enters Rameswaram Cafe in Whitefield

11.37am: The suspect orders from the cafe

11.44am: He keeps a bag containing the bomb near a handwash basin

11.45am: The suspect leaves the café

11.50am: A CCTV camera captures the suspect near the cafe

11.51am: He boards a BMTC Volvo bus

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at Rameswaram Cafe in Bengaluru on Friday. *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Minister: Can't say if any outfit involved

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Saturday said police are conducting an in-depth investigation into the bomb blast at Rameshwaram Cafe and are looking into all angles.

A meeting of senior Home Department officials with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was convened on Saturday afternoon. Investigators have gathered certain information from CCTV footage and the footage from City's public transport buses is also being analysed as part of the probe to nab the culprit, he said.

"At that time on that route, bus number 26 buses had gone. There is information that he (the suspect) has come by bus. So, (route number) 26 buses have been verified at Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC)," Parameshwara said.

"Based on the theory of elimination", more buses are being verified for footage, as BMTC buses have cameras. "Gathering all this information we will nab the culprit. At no cost, we will let go. No matter how much they try to escape, we will not leave them," he added.

At this moment it is not possible to say whether any organisation or an individual was involved, the Home Minister said. There were certain theories during his visit to the cafe on Friday night, expressing suspicion that someone might have done it out of "heartburn", unable to digest the cafe's success and expansion.

Asked whether the probe will be handed over to central agencies, Parameshwara said, "We have efficient officers, we have efficient FSLs (Forensic Science Laboratory). We are advanced. The FSL team has collected samples, and they have gathered information on the timer fixed, and the capacity of the explosive. It will help the investigation."

Responding to Opposition BJP's demand that he quit by accusing him of failing in the maintenance of law and order, the Home Minister said. Seeking resignation has become a practice for them, they seek the resignation of Chief Minister and Home Minister for "everything".

"They keep seeking resignation. When the cooker blast occurred in 2022 did they resign then? We have a responsibility to run the administration, we will not let anyone escape," he said, noting that he had appealed to Opposition not to do politics on this.

—Salar News/PTI

2 injured discharged, rest recovering

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

Two of the 10 people injured in the blast at Rameshwaram Café have been discharged from Vydehi Hospital in Whitefield after treatment. The seven of the injured are undergoing treatment and are in stable condition.

After the blast on Friday, three victims were taken to Brookfield Multi Speciality Hospital while six were admitted to Vydehi Hospital.

The injured are Farooq Hussain, 19, a staff member of the cafe; Deepanshu, 23, an employee of Amazon Company; Swarnamba Narayanappa, 49; Mohan, 41; Nagashree, 35; Momi, 30; Balaram Krishnan, 31; Navya, 25; Srinivas, 67, and one other person whose name is yet to be ascertained by authorities.

Narayanappa, an accountant at Microchip Technology, sustained the most severe injuries, suffering 40 per cent burns on her right upper body. She underwent successful plastic surgery on Friday night and remains in stable condition at Brookfield Multi Speciality Hospital.

Dr Seema, Chief Eye Specialist and HOD of Vydehi Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, said: "One person who was injured had a damaged eye and is undergoing treatment. His eyesight may not come back as the damage is severe. Most of the cornea has ruptured due to the impact of the blast." *– Salar News*

CATERING AT AMBANI WEDDING

Rameshwaram Cafe, known for its delectable offerings and strategic locations across the City, garnered attention for providing catering services at the pre-wedding celebration of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant in Jamnagar in Gujarat.This much talked about event in Jamnagar led to several chefs and suppliers of the Rameshwaram café being away, making it easier for the person to carry out the bomb blast, police said.

Police step up security in City

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

Security has been tightened across Bengaluru, especially at Kempegowda International Airport, M Chinnaswamy cricket stadium, bus stands, railway stations and other areas which witness a higher footfall, following the incident in Brookefield.

City police urged the public to stay vigilant and report any suspicious activity or objects immediately to police helpline 112.

Due to Women's Premier League (WPL 2024) match between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Mumbai Indians at M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday, stringent security measures have been implemented. Police have been deployed at the stadium's main entrance and surrounding areas, ensuring a safe environment for spectators.

Railway stations across the State have also been placed on high alert, with additional police personnel deployed for enhanced security. Any suspicious items discovered are being thoroughly investigated, with swift action taken as necessary. Police are conducting thorough luggage checks at BMTC and KSRTC bus stands in Majestic. *—Salar News*

BOMB BLASTS IN BENGALURU

1. Serial Blasts in 2008:

On 25 July, 2008, nine low-intensity country bombs exploded in parts of Bengaluru, including Madiwala, Nayandahalli and Adugodi. One person was killed and 20 were injured in the incident. Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) or Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) were speculated to be behind the attack.In 2020, City police arrested the main accused who fled India 12 years ago following the bombings. The link was found when four individuals from Kerala were killed by security forces in Kashmir while allegedly attempting to cross into Pakistan for training at a LeT camp. The investigation revealed that these four individuals executed the bombings in Bengaluru.

2. Chinnaswamy Stadium, 2010:

On 17 April, 2010, two explosions occurred in Chinnaswamy Stadium and one was defused. Fifteen people, including five security personnel, were injured. The blasts occurred just before a match between Royal Challengers and Mumbai Indians of Indian Premier League.In 2018, three out of the 14 accused in the Chinnaswamy Stadium bomb blast case pleaded guilty before a special court and were sentenced to jail for seven years. These accused, originally from Bihar and residing in Delhi, were involved in conspiring to plant bombs in Bengaluru. Yasin Bhatkal, identified as the prime accused, is currently in Tihar jail. Another accused, Mohammad Qateel Siddiqui, suspected to be an Indian Mujahideen operative, was killed by inmates at Yerwada jail in Pune for his alleged involvement in anti-national activities.

3. Malleshwaram, 2013:

On 17 April, 2013, a low-intensity bomb detonated in Malleshwaram, Bengaluru, causing chaos and injuring over 16 individuals, including 8 policemen. The explosion occurred near the office of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).In April 2013, the Bengaluru police apprehended three individuals suspected of involvement in the blast. In 2016, two more people were arrested in connection with the blast.

4. Church Street, 2014:

On 28 December, 2014, a blast occurred at Coconut Grove restaurant on Church Street in Bengaluru's upscale MG Road area, resulting in the death of a woman. In 2016, National Investigation Agency and Telangana police arrested a man named Alamzeb Afridi, aged 30, from Bengaluru. Investigations suggested that the Church Street blast might have been the first terror attack in India linked to Islamic State (IS). Afridi is associated with the banned outfit SIMI and accused in the 2008 Ahmedabad serial blasts that claimed 56 lives.

5. Shantinagar, 2020:

In 2020, a low-intensity blast occurred during a cultural programme in Bengaluru's Shanti Nagar. Congress MLA NA Harris and three others were injured in the incident. No arrests have been made so far.

Central Crime Branch probing case: Top cop

BENGALURU, 2 MAR

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda on Saturday said the investigation of the Rameshwaram cafe blast has been handed over to Central Crime Branch and that no arrest has been made in connection with the incident. "All the injured are recovering. No arrest (have been) made," he said in a post on 'X'.

Dayananda said the investigation into the incident, caused by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), is in full swing. "Several teams are working on different leads obtained so far," he said. "Keeping in mind the sensitivity of the case and the security concerns, we appeal to the media to not indulge in speculation and cooperate," Dayananda said.

—PTI

Police at blast site *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Environs for anti-national activities: BJP

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

BJP on Saturday alleged the Congress government in Karnataka has created an "encouraging" atmosphere for anti-national activities in the state.

Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar cited a forensic analysis to assert that "Pakistan zindabad" slogan was indeed raised by Congress MP Syed Naseer Hussain's supporters inside the Assembly premises and also hit out at the State government over a blast in Bengaluru that left 10 persons injured.

Chandrasekhar said that it should be probed if the two incidents are linked. He said Congress leaders, including ministers, as part of coordinated efforts first accused BJP of lying that slogans in support of Pakistan were raised and have now sought to downplay the blast by linking it to business rivalry without any evidence. It is an attempt to pressure the police to brush the incident under the carpet, he claimed.

Chandrasekhar said corruption and appeasement politics have started in full swing since the Congress returned to power in the State. Some people think they are above law when the Congress is in power, he said and accused the government of creating an atmosphere which is encouraging for those engaging in anti-national activities and other crimes. *—PTI*

Food, housing, health & edu priorities: DKS

BENGALURU, 2 MAR

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Saturday that State government prioritises food security, housing, healthcare and education.

Speaking at a home distribution event in KR Puram here, Shivakumar acknowledged former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's legacy in initiating free housing for the underprivileged.

He said an additional Rs 5 lakh grant was allocated by Housing Department due to financial concerns expressed by some beneficiaries under Rajiv Gandhi Housing scheme.

Criticising Central government, Shivakumar questioned Centre for imposing GST on homes for the poor. "How can the poor pay a GST of Rs 1.26 lakh?" he asked.

Shivakumar credited the Congress party for pioneering different schemes like providing rice, land and houses to the underprivileged.

He claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was merely replicating these initiatives.

"Let the BJP and JD(S) say whatever they want, we will continue with our welfare schemes including giving free houses," he said. "Even BJP leaders are vouching for our guarantee schemes," he added.

The Deputy Chief Minister commended Housing Minister Zameer Ahmed and Prasad Abbaiah, the new head of the Karnataka Slum Development Corporation, for their dedication to supporting the underprivileged. *—Salar News*

DOCU DROPPED FROM FILM FESTIVAL

Our voice curtailed: Filmmaker Haravoo

BENGALURU, 2 MAR

With his 2021 documentary on the farmers' protest being dropped from this year's Bangalore International Film Festival, Kannada filmmaker Kesari Haravoo on Saturday said for the last two years, "our voice was being curtailed more and more with every passing day".

"Kisan Satyagraha", Haravoo's documentary on the farmers' protest against the erstwhile three farm laws, was dropped from this year's BIFFES after failing to get a clearance from the Information and Broadcasting Ministry.

The 15th edition of the film festival was inaugurated on 29 February by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and films are screened from 1 to 7 March.

Haravoo said he came to know about his film being dropped from the festival only when the schedule was released. "My film is there in the catalogue released by the BIFFES 2024. But when I checked the schedule, I could not find it. I called the artistic director of the festival, N Vidyashankar, who told me that the film did not get clearance from the Ministry of Information And Broadcasting and had to be dropped at the last minute. I find that our voice is being curtailed more and more with every passing day if we say anything against the establishment," he said.

Kannada filmmaker Kesari Haravoo's 2021 documentary on farmers' protest was dropped from BIFFES *PHOTO: PTI*

Festival director Thrilok Chandra KV said they were not given any reason for the decision by the I&B ministry. "We must send all the films that we are showcasing for clearance. We sent 200 films to the ministry. Initially, six films did not get cleared. We sent them again, of which two films one from Haravoo and one from Ukraine (20 Days in Mariupol) were denied permission. Haravoo's film, being a documentary, did not have any certification," Chandra said.

But Haravoo said there is no rule that only certified films should be showcased at international film festivals in the country. "Documentaries usually are not certified, and many such films have opened at the international film festivals," he added.

Meanwhile, reacting to Haravoo's post about the ban on his Facebook page, another filmmaker from Udupi, and former head of the direction and screenplay department of Annapurna College of Film and Media in Hyderabad, Ramachandra P N said I&B ministry has the authority to stop screening only when public order is disturbed. "A few years back, the Kerala FF went to the courts and won the case in two of the three uncertified films that were not given permission. It took 6 months from the film festival for the courts to decide that.

But the refusal order was termed as illegal as the reason given by the govt was the possible disturbance of law and order- which the court said the State is duty bound to maintain. Will the Karnataka govt go to the courts as its own freedom of expression is at stake? (sic)," he wrote.

In 2017, I&B ministry banned the exhibition of three documentaries "In the Shade of Fallen Chinar" "March, March, March" and "Unbearable Being of Lightness" at the 10th International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala.

The Kerala HC heard the writ petition filed by the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy, the organiser of the festival.

—PTI

MP MLA threatens self-immolation over power issue

RAJGARH, 2 MARCH

The administration in Madhya Pradesh's Rajgarh district announced holding camps to resolve people's issues regarding electricity bills after a BJP MLA threatened to immolate himself over the alleged apathetic attitude of authorities about discrepancies in billing. Speaking at a programme in Pilukhedi industrial area on Friday, Mohan Sharma, BJP MLA from the Narsinghgarh assembly constituency, warned officials of a government-run power company. "I don't want to take the law into my hands. I am aware that IPC section 353 will be imposed if there is a dispute with any officer. I don't want that. But I have a weapon, I know how to use that weapon, and if I am forced to self-immolate and fast unto death, I will do so," Sharma told the gathering.

Section 353 of the Indian Penal Code deals with the use of criminal force to deter a public servant from performing his duty.

The legislator announced going on an indefinite hunger strike against the power company from 5 March. *—PTI*

5-time Odisha MLA resigns from BJD, says will join BJP

BHUBANESHWAR, 2 MARCH

Five-time MLA Arabinda Dhali on Saturday resigned from the ruling BJD and said that he would join the Opposition BJP. Dhali, MLA of Jayadev in Khordha district, said he has sent his resignation letter to BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik via e-mail. He, however, did not mention any reason for his resignation. Dhali was first elected to the assembly from Malkangiri seat in a by-election in 1992 on a BJP ticket. He retained the seat for two consecutive terms. He then joined BJD and was elected to the assembly from Jayadev in 2009. He was the transport and corporation minister in Patnaik's government. Last month, expelled BJD MLAs Pradeep Panigrahy and Prashant Jagdev also joined the BJP. The assembly elections in the state are slated to be held along with the Lok Sabha polls. *—PTI*

Sena MLA thrashes youth 'belonging to anti-social' gang

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

A video of Shiv Sena MLA from Buldhana, Sanjay Gaikwad, thrashing a youth with a stick has gone viral, inviting sharp criticism from the Opposition which claimed the law-and-order situation is deteriorating in the state. Gaikwad said he beat up the youth as the latter was part of an anti-social gang and had hit a policeman. The incident occurred on 19 February during Shiv Jayanti celebrations. "(It is observed that) A gang of youth consumes alcohol and drugs and attacks people, especially women, during events like Shiv Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti," he said. *—PTI*

2 police officers removed after Shahjahan's arrest

KOLKATA, 2 MARCH

West Bengal government on Friday removed two officers from the Basirhat police district, a day after TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh, a key accused in sexual assault and land grab in Sandeshkhali, was arrested after being on the run for 55 days, an official said. DSP of the Director of Intelligence Bureau (DIB), Sujit KuMarchMondal, and inspector Kajal Banerjee were the ones removed from their positions, he said. Mondal was reassigned to the Raiganj Police District, while Banerjee was transferred to the state CID. Rakesh Chatterjee, an inspector at Barrackpore Police District, replaced Mondal, the official said. "Chatterjee will also supervise Hingalganj police station and Hemnagar Cosas police station," he said. In addition, Raktim Chattopadhyay, who previously served as the circle inspector (CI) of Purba Bardhaman district, will replace Banerjee. He was arrested by police on Thursday. *—PTI*

9 more MLAs willing to join us: HP rebel MLA

He says Suku is 'liar No. 1' and workers feel suffocated

SHIMLA, 2 MARCH

Rebel Himachal Pradesh Congress MLA Rajinder Rana on Saturday claimed that nine more party legislators "feeling suffocated" due to Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's style of functioning are in touch with him as he called Sukhu "liar number one."

Rana along with five other Congress MLAs, who had cross-voted in the Rajya Sabha polls, have been disqualified from the Assembly for abstaining from voting on the cut motion and finance bill.

Meanwhile, high drama was witnessed during the Himachal Pradesh Cabinet meeting on Saturday as Ministers Jagat Negi and Rohit Thakur left midway following a "heated debate" over policy decisions, sources said.

"Neither Public Works Department Minister Vikramaditya Singh had told the chief minister that he is meeting the Congress rebels at Panchkula nor the Chief Minister had sent him," Rana said.

"Singh, who met us on his way to Delhi, did not ask us to patch up. He has his grievances against the government which failed to provide land for installing Virbhadra Singh's statue and interfered in his functioning," he added.

Rana, along with five other MLAs who had cross-voted in the Rajya Sabha polls, was disqualified from Himachal Pradesh Assembly **PHOTO: PTI**

In a setback for the ruling Congress in Himachal Pradesh, BJP on Tuesday won the state's lone Rajya Sabha seat despite being in the minority with just 25 MLAs against 40 of the Congress as nine MLAs, including six from the Congress and three independents, voted for BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan.

Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania had on Thursday disqualified six Congress MLAs namely Sudhir Sharma, Ravi Thakur, Rajinder Rana, Inder Dutt Lakhanpal, Chetanya Sharma and Devinder KuMarchBhutto for abstaining from voting on the Cut Motion and the Finance Bill.

After cross-voting by the rebels in the Rajya Sabha polls, Singh had announced his resignation from the Cabinet on Wednesday but softened his stand by the evening after meeting the observers, who said that the resignation had been withdrawn.

— PTI

SUKHU CLAIMS 80% MLAs SUPPORT HIM

SHIMLA, 2 MARCH

Undeterred by critical remarks made by Congress leaders and the internal rift within the state unit of Himachal Pradesh, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu on Saturday affirmed that he still has the support of 80 per cent of MLAs.

On BJP's allegation that Sukhu was providing security to some Congress MLAs outside of protocol, he said that "horsetrading and orchestrating cross-voting" during the recent Rajya Sabha elections was triggered by the BJP.

Asked about speculations that Vikramaditya Singh will split from Congress to form another party, Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said, "I have no such information."

Sukhu on Friday exuded confidence that his government will run for five years *—ANI*

ON 14 MARCH

Farmers during their ongoing protest, at the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border, in Patiala district, on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

400 groups to attend 'Kisan Mahapanchayat'

LUDHIANA, 2 MARCH

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), which spearheaded a farmers' agitation in 2020-21, said on Saturday that more than 400 farmer outfits will participate in a "Kisan Mahapanchayat" in Delhi on 14 March to press Centre to accept their demands, including a law on the minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

Thirty-seven farmer bodies, which are part of the SKM, held a meeting on Saturday regarding their proposed "mahapanchayat" at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan.

Talking to reporters, Bharti Kisan Union (Lakhowal) General Secretary Harinder Singh Lakhowal said farmers are continuously struggling for their demands.

The farm leaders said that they are continuously raising their voice against the Centre regarding their demands, including a legal guarantee on the MSP for all crops and cancellation of the FIRs registered against farmers during the 2020-21 agitation.

Meanwhile, the farmer leaders also rejected the "zero" FIR registered by the Punjab Police in the Shubhkaran Singh death case.

Singh was killed and around 12 police personnel were injured in clashes at the Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana on 21 February.

SKM (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) are spearheading a "Delhi Chalo" march of farmers to press the Centre to accept their demands.

However, the SKM was not part of the "Delhi Chalo" call.

The march was put on hold for two days after Singh was killed on February 21. Two days later, the farmer leaders said the protesters would continue to camp at Khanauri and Shambhu on Punjab's border with Haryana till 29 February.

—PTI

Bharat Ratna to Karpoori an honour for entire Bihar: PM

AURANGABAD, 2 MARCH

Lauding the annoucement of Bharat Ratna-- to former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that this honour belongs to the entire Bihar.

"My arrival in Bihar is special in many aspects. A few days ago, the country honoured the pride of Bihar, Karpoori Thakurji, with the Bharat Ratna. This is the honour for the entire Bihar," said the Prime Minister while addressing a public gathering in Bihar's Aurangabad.Modi further said, "A new chapter towards develpopment of Bihar is being etched in Aurangabad. Today, projects worth 21,000 crores were inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of. These projects include those related to road infrastructure, rail infrastructure and also, it comprises of a glimpse of modern Bihar."

Narendra Modi and Nitish Kumar greet each other during the inauguration of projects, in Aurangabad on Saturday **PHOTO: ANI**

Modi, who is on a visit to Bihar, inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of projects worth Rs 21,400 crores.

I will remain with NDA forever: Nitish

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday assured Prime Minister Narendra Modi that he would remain with BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) forever.

Kumar also assured said that he is confident that NDA will win more than 400 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

—PTI

BJP to contest 12 LS seats in Kerala

T'PURAM, 2 MARCH

In a bid to make inroads into Kerala's tough political environment, the BJP on Saturday fielded actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi and Union Ministers of State V Muraleedharan and Rajeev Chandrasekhar from the Thrissur, Attingal and Thiruvananthapuram constituencies respectively, where the party claims to have a significant vote share.

Besides them, the other prominent candidate fielded by BJP in Kerala is Anil K Antony, son of Congress veteran AK Antony, who will contest from the Pathanamthitta constituency.

Gopi was sworn in as a Rajya Sabha MP after being nominated by the President of India in the category of eminent citizens under Article 80 of the Indian Constitution in 2016.

Suresh Gopi **PHOTO: FACEBOOK**

Muraleedharan, the Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs, was elected as a Rajya Sabha MP from Maharashtra in 2018.

Chandrasekhar is the Union Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Electronics and Information Technology.

He was an independent Rajya Sabha MP representing Karnataka from 2006 to 2018 and was re-elected to the upper House again for a third six-year term in 2018 from the same state as a BJP member.

—PTI

Gambhir, Jayant asks to quit as BJP MPs

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

- Delhi BJP leaders, meanwhile, termed Gambhir a "reluctant" politician

BJP Lok Sabha MP Gautam Gambhir on Saturday requested party president JP Nadda to relieve him of political duties so that he can focus on his upcoming cricket commitments. Similarly, BJP MP Jayant Sinha has also requested the party president JP Nadda to relieve him from direct electoral duties, joining the list of party leaders not contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Gambhir thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for allowing him to serve the people.

The move by Gambhir, came amid buzz in the BJP circles about him being possibly replaced in East Delhi Lok Sabha constituency in the upcoming general elections.

In a post on X, Sinha from Jharkhand's Hazaribagh said he will continue to work with the party on economic and governance issues.Sinha, said he wants to focus his efforts on "combating global climate change in Bharat and around the world".

Delhi BJP leaders, meanwhile, termed Gambhir a "reluctant" politician.

"He never really got into the swing of the things related to the party. Most of the time, he missed party programmes, meetings, and important functions and it so appeared that cricket was still his primary focus," said a senior Delhi BJP leader.

BJP is said to be contemplating giving tickets to several new leaders and some other sitting MPs also are understood to have told the party that they would like to focus on other organisational work.

—PTI

MISLEADING INFORMATION

Gadkari sends notice to Kharge, Ramesh for X post

Nitin Gadkari and Mallikarjun Kharge **PHOTO: ANI**

NAGPUR, 2 MARCH

- The notice said a sinister act had been committed with the sole intent to create confusion

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari sent legal notices to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and General Secretary Jairam Ramesh on Friday for allegedly sharing misleading and defamatory news content about him on X.

Gadkari's lawyer, Balendu Shekhar, said his client was shocked to know about, hear, and see the contents and posts from the official handle of Congress on the microblogging platform.

Kharge and Ramesh deliberately posted a 19-second video clip of Gadkari's interview given to "The Lallantop" web portal, concealing the contextual intent and meaning of his words, the lawyer said.The notice said a sinister act had been committed with the sole intent and ulterior motive to fan and create confusion, sensation, and disrepute for Gadkari in the eyes of the public. It said it was also a futile endeavour to create rifts in the solidarity of BJP, which is poised to win the trust of the people in the upcoming general election under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It said Gadkari's interview was presented by uploading a video that is bereft and devoid of contextual meaning. It said Kharge and Ramesh, despite being aware of the full contents of Gadkari's interview, deliberately posted the Hindi caption and the video clip by concealing the contextual meaning to malign his reputation. *—PTI*

AAP to announce Punjab LS list soon

CHANDIGARH, 2 MARCH

Aam Aadmi Party will announce candidates for all 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab in the next two to four days, party national Convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Saturday.

Kejriwal said that discussion on the candidates for the Lok Sabha polls was going on, and urged the people to make the party victorious in all seats.

"In the next two to four days, the announcement will be made," said Kejriwal while speaking to reporters in Jalandhar after virtually launching 165 'Aam Aadmi Clinics' to be set up across Punjab.

"If you ensure (the party's) victory in all 13 seats, you will strengthen Bhagwant Mann's hands. It is Mann alone who is fighting the Centre. It is Mann who is only fighting the governor and the BJP," said Kejriwal who was accompanied by the Punjab Chief Minister.Kejriwal accused BJP-led Centre of targeting Punjab, and said he was pained when the Central government rejected Punjab's tableau for the Republic Day parade. "It is like insulting the people of Punjab," he said.

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

- Arvind Kejriwal slammed the Centre for allegedly withholding Rs 8,000 crore worth of funds from Punjab

Kejriwal said last year Punjab government had to approach the Supreme Court to convene a budget session in the assembly after the governor refused to allow it. He also slammed the Centre for allegedly withholding Rs 8,000 crore worth of funds from Punjab. Kejriwal said if the Centre had released the funds, more roads would have been constructed, more hospitals and schools would have come up.Hitting out at the SAD, Mann asked if the party can show its face in the villages after stitching up an alliance with the BJP even though the farmers' issue is still to be resolved. *—PTI*

FOR DISPLACED ELECTORS

Spl polling booths in Manipur relief camps

IMPHAL, 2 MARCH

Special polling stations will be set up at relief camps to enable people displaced due to the ethnic strife in Manipur to cast their votes in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, an official statement said.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has issued directions in this regard, the statement issued by the state Chief Electoral Officer on Friday said.

"A large number of electors registered in several parts of the state were displaced from their native places during the conflict that started on 3 May, 2023. Presently, they are residing in relief camps in various districts. The displaced electors are still enrolled at the places where they were residents before the conflict started," it stated.

The displaced electors are still enrolled at the places where they were residents before the conflict started **PHOTO: PTI**

"The ECI, after due consultation with the central and state governments, has directed that all such displaced persons who had to leave their native places during the conflict shall continue to be borne on the electoral rolls of the assembly and parliamentary constituencies concerned in the state," the statement said."As per past precedent of similar nature, the internally displaced electors shall be provided with the facility to vote at special polling stations to be set up in relief camps," it added.

Voting in these special polling stations "shall be conducted using separate EVMs for each parliamentary constituency". All rules and directions applicable for the conduct of polls at the original polling stations will apply at these special polling stations as well, it added.Counting of votes polled at the special polling stations will be conducted by designated assistant returning officers (AROs) at the specified counting centres specially set up for this purpose with the prior approval of the Commission. *—PTI*

HEARING IN RAGA DEFAMATION CASE POSTPONED

Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

SULTANPUR, 2 MARCH

A court hearing scheduled on Saturday in the 2018 defamation case against Rahul Gandhi over his alleged objectionable remarks targeting Home Minister Amit Shah was postponed to 13 March after Congress leader's counsel sought more time saying he was busy with the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

The complaint was filed here against Gandhi for his alleged indecent remarks against Amit Shah during the Karnataka elections six years ago.

But on Saturday his lawyer Kashi Prasad Shukla sought more time from the court."I have got information that Gandhi is busy in Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. Hence, I applied to the court, on which the court has fixed the next hearing for 13 March," Shukla said. Asked if Gandhi will appear in the court on 13 March, the advocate said, "I cannot tell now whether Gandhi will appear in the court on the next hearing or not, but I will say that Gandhi respects the court. If the circumstances are right then he will undoubtedly come and record his statement." *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Four killed, two injured after motorcycles collide

JASHPUR, 2 MARCH

Four people were killed and two others injured after two motorcycles collided in Jashpur district of Chhattisgarh. The incident occurred late Friday evening near Ganjhiadih village in the Tumla area. Three of the deceased were identified as Chandan Nayak of Ganjhiadih village, Khageshwar Dhobi, and Umashankar of nearby Kolhejharia village. Of the remaining two injured, one was shifted to the neighbouring Raigarh district, while another was admitted to the Farsabahar community health center in Jashpur, the official said. "Prima facie, it seems that both the two-wheelers were at a high speed. However, further investigation into the accident is underway", the official added. *—PTI*

7 held after sex racket run by godman busted

THANE, 2 MARCH

Seven people, including a self-styled godman, were arrested for allegedly running a sex racket in the guise of performing rituals for people wanting to get rich, a Thane Crime Branch official said on Saturday. The probe into the racket began after a 15-year-old girl went missing from Rabodi and a kidnapping case was registered. The probe led to the arrest of two people, identified as Aslam Khan and Salim Shaikh, on 25 February, who told police about the main accused Saheblal Wazir Shaikh alias Yusuf Baba, who was held sometime later. "Our probe found that Yusuf Baba and his associates lured financially vulnerable women by promising them riches through black magic. Some of the rituals included participation of women in the nude," the official said.*—PTI*

7-year-old girl attacked by pet pitbull in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

In yet another dog bite incident in the national capital, a seven-year-old girl was injured in an attack by a pet Pitbull in Shahadra's Jagatpuri area. A police officer said the girl was playing outside her house on Friday evening when the dog attacked and dragged her before she was rescued by the locals. The girl was taken to a hospital by her mother and her condition was stated to be out of danger. Police recorded the statement of the girl's mother and scanned CCTV footage from the area to ascertain the sequence of the incident. Delhi has witnessed a couple of dig bite incidents in the last few weeks. *—PTI*

5-yr-old boy drowns in pool during celebration

PANAJI, 2 MARCH

A five-year-old boy drowned in a swimming pool located in a residential complex near Panaji during a birthday party, police said on Saturday. "The boy, Daksha Mauskar, who lived at Valpoi village in North Goa, had come to Old Goa village along with his parents to celebrate the birthday of their family friend. When the celebration was on at the clubhouse of the residential complex, the boy went to the swimming pool and fell into it without anyone noticing him," a senior official from the Old Goa police station said. "When Daksh was not found around, his parents initially thought that he must be playing with other children. However, he was found in the swimming pool. he was then rushed to a nearby private hospital and later shifted to the Goa Medical College, Bambolim, where he was declared dead. *—PTI*

Rat miner Hassan rejects another house offer from govt

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Rat-hole miner Wakeel Hassan, who had lost his house in a demolition drive, has rejected another offer of a house in Dilshad Garden here by the authorities, he told PTI on Saturday.

"On Friday night, four government officers, including an SDM, came and offered me a house in Dilshad Garden but I refused to accept it as they wanted me to shift on a temporary basis," Hassan said.

"It was also not in writing. That house belongs to an NGO," he said.

Hours after the demolition, DDA officials offered Hassan to move to an EWS (economically weaker sections) flat at Narela, which is far from Khajoori Khas in northeast Delhi. Hassan rejected it saying it was "far and unsafe".

On being asked why he is rejecting the second offer as Dilshad Garden is located near Khajoori Khas unlike far-flung Narela, he said the cost of his house, which was razed by the DDA (Delhi Development Authority), was more than Rs 1 crore and if the government wants to compensate, then the cost of the house should be matched.

On Saturday, during the rain in Delhi, he made a video requesting people to come for his support
PHOTO: PTI

Hassan, who claimed to have been staying in Khajoori Khas for several years, had lost his house in a demolition drive by DDA on Wednesday.

He along with his wife and two children have been staying on a footpath and demonstrating against the drive.

- On Saturday, during the rain in Delhi, he made a video requesting people to come for his support. he said that his belongings and household articles are lying open in the rain

On Saturday, during the rain in Delhi, he made a video requesting people to come for his support.

While talking to PTI, he said that his belongings and household articles are lying open in the rain.

"Today is the third day of my demonstration, which will continue till I get the solution from the government," he said.

"After buying the plot, I invested about Rs 8 lakh to build the rooms and also gave money to the DDA employees. The cost of my house has now gone up to more than Rs 1 crore now," he claimed.Veer Dev Kaushik, who lives in the same locality of Khajoori Khas near Hassan's razed house, said the locality was regularised by the Delhi government several years ago, after which he along with many others invested money to buy the plots.

—PTI

Article 21 soul of Constitution, liberty of citizen paramount: SC

SC said court not adjucating matter would deprive person of his right

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Supreme Court has said that Article 21 is the soul of the Constitution as the liberty of a citizen is of paramount importance and the High Court not expeditiously adjudicating matters related to it would deprive a person of this precious right.

A bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice Sandeep Mehta observed after noting that the Bombay High Court has granted bail to one Amol Vithal Vahile, a prime accused in the murder of a corporator in Maharashtra, after a nudge from the apex court on 29 January.

The bench said that it has come across various matters from the Bombay High Court where the bail and anticipatory bail applications were not being decided expeditiously.

We have also come across numerous matters where-

The bench said that it has come across various matters from the Bombay High Court where the bail and anticipatory bail applications were not being decided expeditiously
PHOTO: ANI

in the judges are not deciding the matter on merits but find an excuse to shunt the case on different grounds. We, therefore, request the Chief justice of the High Court of Bombay to convey our request to all judges exercising the criminal jurisdiction to decide the matter about bail/anticipatory bail as expeditiously as possible," the bench said.

Referring to one such case, the bench said in the matter the application for anticipatory bail was not decided for more than four years.

It asked the Registrar (Judicial) of the apex court to communicate this order to the Registrar (Judicial) of the High Court, who shall place the same before the chief justice of the Bombay High Court.

—PTI

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FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Centre, Tripura, TIPRA Motha sign pact in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

A tripartite agreement between Tripura Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance Motha and the governments of Tripura and India was signed on Saturday in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to bring a "lasting solution" to the problems of the state's indigenous people.

With the signing of the agreement, the government has respected history, corrected past wrongs, and accepted the present reality to proceed towards a brighter future, Shah said.

"I assure all stakeholders of Tripura that you won't have to fight for your rights anymore.

The government of India will be two steps ahead in creating mechanisms to safeguard your rights," he said at an event held at North Block here.

Shah said that TIPRA Motha and all tribal parties have played a constructive role and BJP government in Tripura also worked sincerely towards this agreement.

Shah added that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, 11 peace and boundary settlement agreements in Northeastern states were signed.

He said the peace pact with the insurgent group National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) was signed first and this will be the last for the Northeast before going to the Lok Sabha polls.

Tipra Motha supremo Pradyot Debbarma was on a 'fast-unto-death' to demand a permanent solution to the problems of the indigenous people.

—PTI

Kerala Guv suspends VC over vet student's death

T'PURAM, 2 MARCH

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, as Chancellor of Universities in the state, on Saturday suspended the Vice Chancellor of Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University in Wayanad in connection with the recent death of a student studying there.

Khan, in the order of suspension, said that the report given by VC, Prof MR Saseendranath -- was "a testimony to the gross dereliction of duty on the part of the Vice Chancellor" during the developments that led to the death of 20-year-old Siddharthan on 18 February.Governor suggested a probe by a sitting or retired judge of High Court or Supreme Court and said, " Registrar General, High Court of Kerala will be requested in due course."

Siddharthan, who was a second-year Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry student, was found hanging in the bathroom of his hostel on 18 February.

His parents have claimed that he was beaten to death by some local SFI leaders. The police, which had initially registered a case of unnatural death, had later booked 12 students for abetment of suicide, wrongful restraint etc. *—ANI*

TO STRENGTHEN IAF

Defence Ministry seals deal with Indian firm to upgrade Su-30

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The Ministry of Defence has signed a contract with an Indian firm to upgrade the simulators of the Su-30 MKI fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force.

"Led by Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME), this upgrade will incorporate all indigenous weapons and capabilities, enhancing operational training for IAF pilots," an official statement said.

The Su-30 MKI fighter jets are the backbone of the Indian Air Force's fighter fleet and over 270 of them have been inducted in to the force.

Defence Ministry signs deal with Indian firm to upgrade Su-30 MKI fighter aircraft simulator
PHOTO: ANI

The simulators will help in further improving the training of pilots.

Earlier, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) signed five major capital acquisition contracts worth Rs 39,125.39 crore on Friday in Delhi.

The contracts were exchanged in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane. *—ANI*

TN: 3 kids charred to death due to 'gas leak'

CHENNAI, 2 MARCH

Three children of a family succumbed to burns due to a fire accident caused by a suspected gas leak in their house in Chengalpattu near here, police said on Saturday.

The mother of the kids, who also sustained severe burn injuries is undergoing treatment at the Kilpauk Government Medical College Hospital.

A police official said the fire could have been caused due to a gas leak.

The migrant family from Bihar had a stove on the floor and there were no windows in the house. After meeting her husband at his workplace near the Chengalpattu railway station, the woman returned home along with her three children on Thursday and turned on the lights, the official said.

The children aged seven and five and the toddler succumbed on Friday while their mother was referred to the Kilpauk Government Medical College Hospital for further treatment

—PTI

Unfortunate that people call tantriks for solutions: HC

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

It is an unfortunate reality of our times that people knock on the doors of tantriks/babas for solutions to their problems, Bombay High Court has said while upholding the conviction of a man for sexually assaulting six intellectually challenged girls.

The High Court, in its judgment passed last month but made available on Saturday, also upheld the life sentence imposed on the 45-year-old man, who claimed to be a Tantrik.

A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Manjusha Deshpande said this was a "bizarre case of blind faith" and the accused does not deserve any leniency.

The prosecution's case is that the accused, who claims to be a Tantrik/baba, sexually exploited six intellectually challenged girls on the pretext of curing them.

He also allegedly financially exploited the girls' parents and took Rs 1.30 crore from them under the garb of curing the minors.

The man filed an appeal in the High Court, challenging the session's court order.

High Court dismissed his appeal and upheld the conviction and sentence, noting that this was not a case where the sentence should be reduced. *—PTI*

NIA arrests accused in Nizamabad PFI case

New Delhi, 2 March

National Investigation Agency has arrested an absconding accused, carrying a cash reward of Rs 2 lakh for his arrest, in the Nizamabad PFI case involving an anti-India conspiracy by the banned outfit to carry out acts of terror, spokes person said. *—PTI*

WORLD BIRTH DEFECTS DAY

Need to raise awareness on birth defects: WHO

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

On the eve of the World Birth Defects Day 2024, the World Health Organisation on Saturday highlighted the need to raise awareness about birth defects and accelerate actions to prevent, detect and manage congenital anomalies which occur during intra-uterine life of infants. "We are reminded that every journey matters and the journey of health indeed begins before birth," Saima Wazed, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia said in a statement.

A regional guidance document on screening newborns for three conditions -- hearing impairment, eye abnormalities, and neonatal hyperbilirubinaemia -- is being released on this occasion to facilitate capacity-building of member states, Wazed said.

Between 2000 and 2021, the contribution of birth defects to child mortality increased in WHO South-East Asia Region from 4 per cent to 11 per cent
PHOTO: PIXABAY

She pointed out that the contribution of congenital disorders to death is increasing globally among children aged below five years.

Between 2000 and 2021, the contribution of birth defects to child mortality increased in our WHO South-East Asia Region from 4 per cent to 11 per cent, and globally from 4.6 percent to 8 per cent, she said.

"Birth defects are sadly now the third most common cause of death among under-5 children in our Region, accounting for 11 per cent of the total. This is equivalent to the deaths of 300 under-5 children every single day," Wazed said.

The WHO regional director said while genetics plays a major role in their aetiology (study of the causes of a disease), many birth defects are preventable through addressing environmental factors.

These include exposure to pollutants, lifestyle choices and socioeconomic conditions that affect pregnant women and fetuses.

Accelerating prevention, management and care for birth defects is a priority, and we as a region have issued a "call for action" in five key areas, Wazed highlighted.

First, countries need to place birth defects high on their agenda and expand commitment and leadership at both the policy and programme levels, along with commensurate financial allocations, she said.

Secondly, the new regional document and videos on universal newborn screening of three conditions hearing impairment, eye abnormalities and neonatal hyperbilirubinaemia provide guidance on how simple bedside tests can be integrated within the existing health system, she added. *—PTI*

'India to produce 30% of world's milk by 2030'

GUWAHATI, 2 MARCH

The National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) is working to increase productivity so that India can account for one-third of the global milk production by 2030, its chairman Meenesh Shah said.

He said breeding, nutrition and health of animals are the main focus areas for achieving the target.

"Currently, India accounts for 24 per cent or one-fourth of total world milk production. This contributes to 4-5 per cent of our Gross domestic product (GDP). Our plan is to increase the share globally to 30 per cent or one-third of world milk production by 2030," he said.

Increasing the productivity of animals is crucial to achieving it, Shah said, pointing out that though India is the largest producer of milk, animal productivity is less than in developed countries.

"The Government of India and NDDB are working together on its mission to increase productivity. Breeding, nutrition and health of animals are the crucial areas in this regard," he added.

"Our milk production has been growing at 6 per cent per annum for the last five-six years, while the global growth rate is 2 per cent. We have to maintain it," Shah said.In Assam, the NDDB has formed a joint venture company with the state government to work for holistic development of the dairy sector, he said."In the next seven years, the plan is to increase procurement of milk and bring more farmers under the cooperative movement," he said. *—PTI*

FRESH DRIZZLES

Boatmen cross the Dal Lake amid rains, in Srinagar, on Friday. Several areas in the higher reaches of Jammu and Kashmir received fresh snowfall while the plains were lashed by rain ***PHOTO: PTI***

From accolades to scepticism: Story of EVMs

When the first elector presses a button on the ballot unit to vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the electronic voting machine (EVM) will have reached the important milestone of being used in five parliamentary polls since 2004.

The journey of the EVM has been quite eventful with several political parties questioning its reliability and others hailing how quickly results are announced with little scope of rigging.EVM was first conceived in 1977. Its prototype was developed by the Electronics Corporation of India Ltd (ECIL), Hyderabad, a PSU under the Department of Atomic Energy, in 1979.After reaching a broad consensus on the introduction of EVMs, the EC issued directives under Article 324 of the Constitution for their use. On 19 May, 1982, the machines were used on a pilot basis in 50 polling stations during election to Parur assembly seat in Kerala.

Use of EVMs without an express provision in the law was later challenged in the Supreme Court.

The apex court refrained from making any comment on the defects or advantages of EVMs but it held that the EC's order regarding casting of ballots by machines was without jurisdiction.Election of the winning candidate from Parur constituency with respect to the 50 polling stations where the EVMs were used was set aside.

The Representation of the People Act was amended in December 1988 and a new section, 61A, was included in the law, empowering the EC to use EVMs. The amendment came into force on 15 March, 1989.

After Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL), Bengaluru, a Defence Ministry PSU, demonstrated an EVM prototype, it was selected along with ECIL to manufacture the machines.

In 1990, the central government instituted an Electoral Reforms Committee under Dinesh Goswami with representatives from several national and state parties.

The committee recommended the examination of EVMs by a team of technical experts. The expert committee unanimously recommended the use of EVMs without any further delay, marking it technically sound, secure and transparent.

In 1998, a general consensus was reached on the use of EVMs for conducting Indian elections and they were used in 16 assembly constituencies across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. Use of EVMs was further expanded in 1999 to 46 parliamentary constituencies, and in February 2000, the machines were used in 45 assembly seats in Haryana polls. EVMs were used in all assembly elections thereafter.

In the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, EVMs were used in all 543 constituencies.

The pre-2006 era EVMs are known as 'M1 EVMs', while those manufactured between 2006 to 2010 are called 'M2 EVMs'. The latest generation of EVMs, produced since 2013, are known as 'M3 EVMs'.

To improve the transparency and verifiability in the poll process, the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 were amended in 2013 to introduce the use of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines.

They were first used in the by-election for the Noksen Assembly seat in Nagaland.

At least one ballot unit, one control unit and one VVPAT make up one EVM.

The tentative cost of an EVM included Rs 7,900 per ballot unit, Rs 9,800 per control unit and Rs 16,000 per VVPAT.

Since 2019, VVPAT slips from five randomly selected polling stations per constituency are matched with the EVM count for greater transparency.

Several Opposition parties, including those part of the INDIA bloc, have demanded that slips in all constituencies should be matched with the EVM count for greater transparency and have questioned the reliability of EVMs.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had once dubbed EVM as 'Modi Voting Machine' (MVM) while former Uttar Pradesh chief minister and BSP leader Mayawati has been demanding that the ballot system be reintroduced.

The government, however, has gone on record to say that there is no proposal to reintroduce the ballot system.

In a written reply in the Lok Sabha in August last year, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal had said that the EC has informed that some representations have been received regarding the reintroduction of the ballot system.EC, he said, has been conducting elections using EVMs since 1982. The use of EVMs and VVPAT machines is legally sanctioned by the Parliament in the form of clear provisions in the Representation of the People Act, he noted.

On concerns raised by Opposition parties over the efficacy of EVMs, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said it was the poll panel's responsibility to convince political parties.

Interestingly, EVMs work as an aggregator of votes in direct elections and not for a system of proportional representation like Presidential and Rajya Sabha polls. *—PTI*

On 19 May, 1982, the Electronic Voting Machines were used on a pilot basis in 50 polling stations during election to Parur Assembly seat in Kerala ***PHOTO: PTI***

SALAR سالار

Microplastics in human placenta raise concerns

Microplastics found in every human placenta was tested in a study, leaving the researchers worried about the potential health impacts on developing foetuses.

The scientists analysed 62 placental tissue samples and found the most common plastic detected was polyethylene, which is used to make plastic bags and bottles. A second study revealed microplastics in all 17 human arteries tested and suggested the particles may be linked to clogging of the blood vessels.

Microplastics have also recently been discovered in human blood and breast milk, indicating widespread contamination of people's bodies. The impact on health is as yet unknown but microplastics have been shown to cause damage to human cells in the laboratory. The particles could lodge in tissue and cause inflammation, as air pollution particles do, or chemicals in the plastics could cause harm.

Huge amounts of plastic waste are dumped in the environment and microplastics have polluted the entire planet, from the summit of Mount Everest to the deepest oceans. People are known to consume the tiny particles via food and water as well as breathing them in, and they have been found in the faeces of babies and adults.

Prof Matthew Campen, at the University of New Mexico, US, who led the research, said: "If we are seeing effects on placentas, then all mammalian life on this planet could be impacted. That's not good."

He said the growing concentration of microplastics in human tissue could explain puzzling increases in some health problems, including inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), colon cancer in people under 50, and declining sperm counts. A 2021 study found people with IBD had 50% more microplastics in their faeces.

Campen said he was deeply concerned by the growing global production of plastics because it meant the problem of microplastics in the environment "is only getting worse".

The research, published in the Toxicological Sciences journal, found microplastics in all the placenta samples tested, with concentrations ranging from 6.5 to 790 micrograms per gram of tissue. PVC and nylon were the most common plastics detected, after polyethylene.

The microplastics were analysed by using chemicals and a centrifuge to separate them from the tissue, then heating them and analysing the characteristic chemical signature of each plastic. The same technique was used by scientists at the Capital Medical University in Beijing, China, to detect microplastics in human artery samples.

Microplastics were first detected in placentas in 2020, in samples from four healthy women who had normal pregnancies and births in Italy. The scientists said: "Microplastics carry with them substances which, acting as endocrine disruptors, could cause long-term effects on human health."

The concentration of microplastics in placentas was especially troubling, Campen said. The tissue grows for only eight months, as it starts to form about a month into pregnancy. "Other organs of your body are accumulating over much longer periods of time," he added.

—Courtesy, The Guardian

Microplastics have been discovered in human blood and breast milk, indicating contamination of people's bodies ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

People are known to consume the tiny particles via food and water as well as breathing them in, and they have been found in the faeces of babies and adults ***PHOTO: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Are mass protests making any difference across the globe?

The current global wave of protest calling for a ceasefire in Gaza has included mass demonstrations, street blockades, and efforts to disrupt arms manufacturing. This continues a decade-long trend of rising protest around the world, save for a temporary decline during the pandemic.

Somewhat ironically, with so much collective action, those taking part in protests are often challenged with scepticism and the question: "It doesn't make a difference, so why bother?"

This appears to be the view of the UK's Home Secretary, James Cleverly, who said recently: "The question I ask myself is, What are these protests genuinely hoping to achieve?' They're not really saying anything new."

Most of the UK public believes that protests rarely, if ever, make a difference.

Protests do work

This is surprising, given that we constantly see examples where protest has made a difference. We have, already in 2024, seen blockades and protests by French farmers prompt the government to offer concessions.

Likewise, in India, the renewed farmers movement marching towards Delhi has already prompted an offer from the government of improved prices for crops.

Mass street protests over a child sex abuse scandal in Budapest recently led Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, to introduce legislation to address the scandal.Late last year, mass protests and street blockades in Panama led to the government closing one of the world's largest copper mines.Academic research also shows that protest can be influential. Workers' protest and strike action was crucial in prompting Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal as part of the creation of the US welfare state. And disruptive protests have also slowed down the adoption of the austerity measures which have eroded welfare states across the high-income democracies for the past 40 years.

Colonialism was met with ongoing resistance and protest in almost every instance, including Gandhi's campaign of non-violent civil disobedience, as well as more militant campaigns. This grew throughout the 20th century, until maintaining occupation ultimately proved unmanageable for the colonial powers.

Given all this evidence, why do many people remain convinced that protest is ineffective?

One possible reason is that many of the underpinning motives for protest exploitation, racism, patriarchy, and the poor quality of democracy are systemic problems, that many argue are byproducts of capitalism. These problems can be challenged through collective action, but only eradicated through system-wide change, which is obviously far more difficult to achieve.

This can create the appearance that, while protests may prompt political and social reform, the status quo, broadly speaking, remains impossible to change.

There is also, of course, some truth to the scepticism. Protest is not a panacea.

Sometimes it results in desired political and social change, other times a compromise is reached. And sometimes, it can prompt repression and coercion, resulting in a worse outcome altogether.

The impact of the many different protests and campaigns that took place in the UK during the 2010s. have identified a number of factors that determine the most effective protests.

1. Disruption

While disruptive protest can be unpopular, there can be no doubt that it is effective. One of the most successful environmental campaigns of the 2010s was the anti-fracking movement, in which protests physically obstructed or interfered with the fracking operation, to the degree to that it could not proceed.

Eventually fracking was abandoned altogether.

But disruption also brings the risk of repression. Three anti-fracking protesters were given prison sentences, although these were subsequently overturned. Since the pandemic, the UK government has introduced repressive measures which further criminalise disruptive protest.

If you are worried about how you might be treated if you attend a protest, the independent legal rights organisation Green and Black Cross has put together a useful guide to your protest rights.

2. Political support

Protest has the potential to put issues on the political agenda. But it often requires sections of the political elite normally opposition parties to take up those issues, and pressure the government into taking action.

Last year in Georgia, anti-government protests erupted against a so-called "foreign agents law" which penalised foreign-owned or foreign-funded media outlets and NGOs and was widely seen as a pro-Russian move.

The protests were buoyed by the encouragement of the president Salome Zurabishvili, an independent. She promised to veto the bill, eventually forcing the government to withdraw the proposed legislation.

3. Persistence

While single protest events can take place without producing the desired outcome, campaigns that make a difference often require action over many days, weeks, or sometimes years.

To take one example, in 2018 the Royal Bank of Scotland announced it would stop funding new coal projects worldwide, after a decade-long campaign of protest by climate change activists.The movement for a ceasefire in Gaza might feel as if it is having little effect, especially when we see daily the devastating destruction of human life. Yet, partly as a result of such action, political divisions among those supporting the Israeli government are beginning to show. Even the US is beginning to talk of a ceasefire. Protest cannot be ignored indefinitely.Even when protest doesn't lead to immediate political or social change, there are other positive consequences of taking part. Protest activity can be empowering, and provide the skills and networks necessary to participate in future political activity.

Research have shown that the effects of participating in such protest can have a longstanding impact on the lives of those who take part.

Courtesy, The Conversation

The renewed farmers movement marching towards New Delhi has already prompted an offer from the government of improved prices for crops ***PHOTO: PTI***

Dancer from Kolkata shot dead in US, probe on

MISSOURI, 2 MARCH

The Indian Consulate in Chicago has condoled the demise of Indian dancer, Amarnath Ghosh, who was allegedly shot dead by an unknown assailant in St Louis, Missouri in the United States. The Indian mission in a statement on Friday (local time) said that it is following up the case with forensic, investigation and with police. "Deep condolences to family & friends of deceased Amarnath Ghosh in StLouis, Missouri. We are following up forensic, investigation with police & providing support," the Indian Consulate in Chicago posted on X. The incident was flagged by television actor Devoleena Bhattacharjee, who said that her close friend Ghosh, a Kolkata based Kuchipudi and Bharatnatyam dancer who was pursuing a PhD in the US was shot dead in St Louis on Tuesday and urged the Indian Embassy in and the External Minister S Jaishankar to initiate and investigation into the matter. *—ANI*

Dhaka: 3 arrested in connection with fire at shopping mall

DHAKA, 2 MARCH

Bangladesh police have arrested three persons, including two owners of a restaurant, in connection with the massive fire that broke out at a shopping mall in the capital Dhaka that killed at least 46 people. The fire broke out around 9:50 pm on Thursday at the restaurant named "Kacchi Bhai" on the first floor of the building, Green Cozy Cottage, and quickly spread to the upper floors that had more restaurants and a garment shop, according to fire service officials. Two owners of an eatery called Chumuk and the manager of Kacchi Bhai restaurant were arrested on Friday, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Additional Commissioner Kh Mahid Uddin said. He said, "The fire started from the food shop on the ground floor of the building. The police will file a case over negligence in connection with the deaths in the fire incident." Besides, anyone from the victim's family can file a case if they want, said the police official. *—PTI*

Taiwan tracks 9 Chinese military aircraft

TAIPEI, 2 MARCH

Nine Chinese military aircraft and 8 naval vessels were tracked by Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) around Taiwan between 6 am on Friday (local time) and 6 am on Saturday (local time), Taiwan News reported. Four out of nine People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait median line and entered the southwest corner of Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ). The MND said it monitored the situation and responded by deploying appropriate resources and forces. "9 PLA aircraft and 8 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 am today. 4 of the aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan's SW ADIZ," Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence posted on X. *—ANI*

Everest is dirty now: Edmund Hillary's associate

KATHMANDU, 2 MARCH

The only surviving member of the mountaineering expedition that first conquered Mount Everest said Saturday that the world's highest peak is too crowded and dirty, and the mountain is a god that needs to be respected. Kanchha Sherpa, 91, was among the 35 members in the team that put New Zealander Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide Tenzing Norgay atop the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) peak on May 29, 1953. "It would be better for the mountain to reduce the number of climbers," Kanchha said in an interview in Kathmandu on Saturday, "Right now there is always a big crowd of people at the summit." Since the first conquest, the peak has been climbed thousands of times, and it gets more crowded every year. During in 2023, 667 climbers scaled the peak, but that brought in thousands of support staff to the base camp between the months of March and May. *—AP*

US launches strikes against Houthi targets

US said that they shot down 5 aerial vehicles

SANAA, 2 MARCH

The United States military said that it conducted a self-defence strike against Iranian-backed Houthi surface-to-air missile in Yemen on Friday (local time).

According to the US Central Command, the missile was prepared to be launched from Houthi controlled areas of Yemen towards the Red Sea and presented an 'imminent threat' to US aircraft in the Red Sea

It added that one anti-ship ballistic missile was launched by the Houthis, but there was "no impact or damage to any vessels."

"On 1 March, at approximately 12.40 pm (Sanaa time), US Central Command (CENTCOM) forces conducted a self-defence strike against one Iranian-backed Houthi surface-to-air missile that was prepared to launch from Houthi controlled areas of Yemen towards the Red Sea. CENTCOM forces identified the missile and determined it presented an imminent threat to US aircraft in the region," US Central Command posted on X.

According to the US Central Command, the missile was prepared to be launched from Houthi controlled areas of Yemen ***PHOTO: PTI***

- It added that one anti-ship ballistic missile was launched by the Houthis, but there was "no impact or damage to any vessels"

"At 10.46 pm (Sanaa time), the Houthis launched one anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) from Yemen into the Red Sea. There was no impact or damage to any vessels," it added. The strikes come amid heightened tensions in the region, where Houthi fighters have carried out attacks on commercial and military shipping since November.

The Houthis initially said that they would target Israel-linked ships in a show of solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, but later expanded their targets to include vessels linked to the United Kingdom and the US, Al Jazeera reported.

US Central Command has said that US aircraft and a coalition warship shot down five Iranian-backed Houthi one-way attack (OWA) unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in the Red Sea on Tuesday between 9.50 pm (Sanaa time) to 10:55 pm (Sanaa time). Last month, US forces and the United Kingdom Armed Forces, with the support of several other countries, conducted strikes against 18 Houthi targets in Iranian-backed Houthi terrorist-controlled areas of Yemen. *—ANI*

2.45 MILLION DISPLACED

UN reports large number of gunshot wounds in Gaza

GAZA, 2 MARCH

Many of the people treated for injuries following a rush on an aid convoy in Gaza on Thursday suffered gunshot wounds, the UN has said.

UN observers visited Gaza City's al-Shifa Hospital and saw some of the roughly 200 people still being treated. Hamas, which governs Gaza, has accused Israel of firing at civilians, but Israel said most died in a stampede after its troops fired warning shots. Leaders around the world have called for a full investigation.

The incident unfolded after hundreds of people descended on an aid convoy as it moved along a coastal road, accompanied by the Israeli military, in the early hours of Thursday morning.

The World Food Programme has warned that a famine is imminent in northern Gaza, which has received very little aid in recent weeks, and where an estimated 3,00,000 people are living with little food or clean water. *—BBC News*

At least 115 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 others injured on Thursday ***PHOTO: PTI***

GUNFIRE ACCOUNTED FOR 80% OF THE WOUNDS, SAYS HEAD OF HOSPITAL

RAFAH, 2 MARCH

The head of a Gaza City hospital that treated some of the Palestinians wounded in the bloodshed surrounding an aid convoy said on Friday that more than 80 per cent had been struck by gunfire, suggesting there was heavy shooting by Israeli troops.

At least 115 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 others injured on Thursday, according to health officials, when witnesses said nearby Israeli troops opened fire as huge crowds raced to pull goods off an aid convoy.

Israel said many of the dead were trampled in a crowd surge that started when desperate Palestinians in Gaza rushed the aid trucks. Israel said its troops fired warning shots after the crowd moved toward them in a threatening way.

Mohammed Salha, the acting director of Al-Awda Hospital, told that of the 176 wounded brought to the facility. *—AP*

Israel adopting 'European' standards on food imports

TEL AVIV, 2 MARCH

Israel's Ministry of Health announced the opening of food and tobacco import routes that comply with European regulations and based on a declaration of legal marketing in Europe. The move, said the ministry, was made out of a desire to "harmonize and fully integrate the European regulation with the Israeli one." The ministry will publish legal memoranda on the matter as early as next week.

The leading principle in the opening of the new routes is the transfer of responsibility for the integrity and safety of the products to the importer in accordance with what is customary in Europe and giving the importer tools to carry out quality processes for risk management and quality control of the products imported to Israel. In the field of food, the ministry said it continues to adopt additional European regulations beyond those it has already adopted in the past. This, it expects, will create optimal conditions for importing food into Israel and will allow regulatory certainty for Israeli industry as well. *—ANI*

Shehbaz Sharif set to become Pak's PM

ISLAMABAD, 2 MARCH

Top Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Shehbaz Sharif is set to become the 33rd prime minister of Pakistan on Sunday, once again leading a coalition government, amidst allegations of rigging of polls and facing staggering economic and security challenges.

Shehbaz, who is the joint candidate of PML-N and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), has already submitted his nomination. His challenger Omar Ayub Khan of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf too has filed his papers. PML-N President Shehbaz, 72, is the younger brother of former three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, 74. Voting in the National Assembly to elect the new prime minister would be held on Sunday, according to the National Assembly Secretariat.

The successful candidate will be administered the oath of office on Monday at the Presidential mansion, Aiwan-e-Sadr. Shehbaz is known as an able administrator due to the swift execution of mega-development projects while serving as chief minister of the Punjab province. However, he failed to exhibit the qualities when elevated to serve as prime minister for a 16-month stint in 2022.

Shehbaz Sharif ***PHOTO: ANI***

He faces the menacing challenges of a fragile economy and the increasing threat of terrorism. His government would also have to face the street power of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party which had been protesting against the alleged rigging of elections. In the 8 February polls, the Sharifs-led party failed to garner a clear majority, albeit technically, it is the largest party with 75 out of 265 seats. In a surprise move, the elder Sharif stepped back in favour of Shehbaz to allow him to lead the coalition as he is believed to have the knack of taking along diverse groups in the polarised country. *—PTI*

NAVALNY'S FUNERAL

Over 100 detained across Russia

Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya visit the grave of Alexei Navalny ***PHOTO: AP***

MOSCOW, 2 MARCH

Over 115 people have been arrested across Russia for commemorating the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny, CNN reported, citing monitoring group OVD-Info.

Novosibirsk witnessed the highest detentions, with 16 individuals taken into custody. Moscow, where Navalny was interred, saw at least 10 detentions, while Yekaterinburg and the Voronezh region had 10 and 14 detentions, respectively.

OVD-Info is an independent media and human rights defence group focused on monitoring and combating repression in Russia. Other cities, including Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Vladikavkaz, Sochi, St Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan, and Ulan-Ude, also reported detentions.

Despite a substantial police presence and the threat of detainment, thousands gathered in Moscow for Navalny's funeral.

The funeral service, held at the Church of the Icon of the Mother of God "Quench My Sorrows," displayed an open casket with Navalny's face covered in flowers, and his coffin was lowered to the strains of Frank Sinatra's 'My Way'.

The burial occurred at Borisovsky cemetery in Moscow's Maryino district, where Navalny resided. His parents, including his father Anatoly, and foreign diplomats were present. *—PTI*

FREEZING TEMPERATURES

A lone camper truck moves north bound on the 1-80 at the Donner Pass Exit in Truckee, California. The most powerful Pacific storm of the season is forecast to bring up to 10 feet of snow into the Sierra Nevada by the weekend ***PHOTO: AP***

US to take weeks to consider Ukrainian aid

WASHINGTON, 2 MARCH

Ukrainian drones fly without ammunition. Russian artillery unleash deadly volleys from safe positions beyond the range of Kyiv's troops. Shortages of ammo and supplies are resulting in lost ground to Moscow, US congressional leaders warn, yet the Republican-controlled House has shown little hurry to resupply Ukraine with military aid.

Across Washington, officials are viewing the drop-off in ammunition shipments with increasing alarm. It's now been over two months since the US — which since World War II has fashioned itself as the "Arsenal of Democracy" — last sent military supplies to Ukraine.

PHOTO: ANI

But House Speaker Mike Johnson appears determined to chart his own course away from a USD 95 billion foreign aid package passed by the Senate — a decision that could stall the package for weeks to come after an already arduous months-long wait in Congress.

With US military shipments cut off, Ukrainian troops withdrew from the eastern city of Avdiivka last month, where outnumbered defenders had withheld a Russian assault for four months. Delays in military support from the West are complicating the task for Kyiv's military tacticians, forcing troops to ration ammunition and ultimately costing the lives of Ukrainian soldiers.

Defence officials are discussing options, which include possibly tapping existing stockpiles even before Congress approves funding to replenish them, according to Sen Jack Reed, the chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

President Joe Biden, the two top Democrats in Congress and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell all took turns intensely urging Johnson to take up a Senate-passed package that would provide USD 60 billion worth of assistance for Kyiv. *—AP*

Drone attack rocks Russian apartment

MOSCOW, 2 MARCH

A drone attack damaged an apartment building in St Petersburg Saturday morning, according to Russian state news agency RIA Novosti. Six people received medical help after the explosion rocked the building, the agency said, citing the press service of the city's health care committee. The Mash news site said that the apartment building was hit by a Ukrainian drone. —

Imran's interim bail confirmed

LAHORE, 2 MARCH

A Pakistani court has confirmed the interim bail of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan in four cases related to the 9 May violence and others, according to a media report on Saturday. The 71-year-old Pakistan-Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party founder is currently incarcerated at Rawalpindi's high-security Adiala jail in multiple cases. On 9 May last year, Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party workers vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Jinnah House (Lahore Corps Commander house), Mianwali air base, the ISI building in Faisalabad, and the Army headquarters in Rawalpindi.

During the hearing of the bail petitions of the PTI founder on Friday, Anti-Terrorism Court Judge Arshad Javed confirmed Khan's interim bail in four cases related to the 9 May violence and others. The court confirmed the interim bail of Khan in cases of attack on police outside Zaman Park, murder of PTI activist Zille Shah, torching of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) office in Model Town and a container at Kalma Chowk, subject to furnishing of surety bonds of PKR 500,000, the report said. *—PTI*

RISHI SUNAK URGES NEED TO PROTECT DEMOCRACY

LONDON, 2 MARCH

Prime Minister of United Kingdom Rishi Sunak has issued an impassioned plea for Britain to protect its democracy as he warned that extremist forces were out to tear the country apart and undermine its multi-faith identity.

Referencing his own Hindu beliefs, the British Indian leader on Friday stressed that the enduring values of the UK are about embracing migrants of all faiths and ethnicities and urged protesters to ensure peaceful demonstrations are not hijacked by extremist forces. "Immigrants who have come here have integrated and contributed. They have helped write the latest chapter in our island story. They have done this without being required to give up their identity," said Sunak in a speech outside 10 Downing Street. *—PTI*

IN 2023

11 children were abused daily in Pak: NCHR

ISLAMABAD, 2 MARCH

In Pakistan, a staggering 4,213 cases of child abuse were reported in the year 2023, with an alarming average of 11 children facing abuse each day, according to the 'Cruel Numbers 2023' report released by the non-profit organisation Sahil, in collaboration with the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), Geo News reported.

The comprehensive report encompasses various forms of child abuse, including sexual abuse, abduction, missing children, and child marriages.

The gender breakdown reveals that out of the total reported cases, 53 per cent of victims were girls, and 47 per cent were boys.

Notably, children between the ages of 6 and 15 were identified as the most vulnerable to abuse, with a higher number of boys than girls reported as victims within this age group. Shockingly, even children as young as 0-5 years old fell victim to sexual abuse, as reported by Geo News.

PHOTO: PIXBAY

The report delves into the categorisation of abusers, highlighting that acquaintances remain the primary perpetrators of child sexual abuse, followed by relatives, family members, strangers, and women abettors.

Geographically, Punjab reported the highest number of cases, accounting for 75% of the total, followed by 13 per cent in Sindh, 7 per cent in Islamabad, 3 per cent in KP, and 2 per cent in Balochistan, AJK, and GB combined.

Expressing concern over the distressing figures, NCHR Chairperson Rabia Javeri Agha emphasised the urgent need to address the issue of child abuse. She lamented the absence of a notified national action plan on child abuse by the Government of Pakistan despite the alarming statistics. *—ANI*

Star Wars game cancelled as EA cuts 670 jobs

NEW YORK, 2 MARCH

Electronic Arts (EA) is cancelling an upcoming Star Wars game and will lay off 5 per cent of its employees globally- approximately 670 people. The game, which was in early development, would have been a first-person shooter set in the Star Wars universe. The firm said the "streamlining" would "deliver deeper, more connected experiences for fans". It is the latest example of the job cuts sweeping the gaming industry. "With it being an extremely difficult time to obtain funding to start a new game studio, and thousands being laid off by the month, video games run a significant risk of losing top talent outside of the industry and being impacted for years," said Rich Barham, a former executive at gaming studio, Blizzard. EA announced in December 2023 it would be laying off staff at UK developer Codemasters, known for racing games F1 23 and EA Sports WRC. In a letter to staff, boss Andrew Wilson said the company had begun contacting affected employees, with the redundancies anticipated to be completed by summer. He also explained the decision to develop fewer new titles.In a subsequent email to staff, EA entertainment boss Laura Miele said this meant cancelling the upcoming Star Wars title being worked on by subsidiary Respawn Entertainment.

—BBC News

Coal production from captive, commercial mines rises 27%

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The coal production from captive and commercial mines has increased 27.06 per cent year-on-year to 126.8 million tonnes (MT) in the April-February this fiscal.The coal dispatch from the captive and commercial mines in the first eleven months of the current financial year also rose 29.14 per cent to 128.88 MT over the corresponding period of previous fiscal, the coal ministry said in a statement.The total coal production and dispatch in February was 14.85 MT and 12.95 MT, registering an increase of 37 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively. In the year-ago period, The total coal production and dispatch stood at 10.85 MT and 9.72 MT, respectively. As of 29 February, 2024, the total number of producing mines was 54, with 35 allocated to the power sector, 11 allocated to the non-regulated sector, and 8 for the sale of coal.Of the 91 mines awarded under commercial coal auctions, seven blocks have already started production. *—PTI*

Telegram to launch ad revenue sharing using toncoin

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

Telegram CEO and founder Pavel Durov announced today that the company is launching its ad platform next month, allowing channel owners to receive financial rewards. The company will pay out rewards using toncoin on the TON blockchain. Channel owners will start receiving 50 per cent of all revenue that the company makes from displaying ads in their channels. Telegram channels allow users to broadcast public messages to large audiences. Durov says that while broadcast channels on Telegram generate one trillion views every month, only 10 per cent of these views are monetized with Telegram Ads, its promotion tool. In March, the Telegram Ad Platform will open to channel owners in nearly one hundred countries, marking a major shift toward content monetization. The company said it isn't ready to share criteria for revenue sharing yet. The TON token soared nearly 40 per cent to over USD 2.92 following the immediate release of the news, and is sitting at USD 2.65 at the time of writing. With this latest announcement, Telegram will be joining the likes of YouTube and X both of which offer ad revenue sharing with users Telegram has more than 800 million monthly active users around the world.

—TechCrunch

WTO talks end without decision on agri, fisheries subsidies

India however managed to keep non-trade issues out of the agenda

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

As part of a permanent solution, India has asked for measures like amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap ***PHOTO: ANI***

Talks at the WTO's ministerial conference ended with no decision on key issues such as finding a permanent solution to public food stockpile and on curbing fisheries subsidies, but the members agreed to further extend the moratorium on imposing import duties on e-commerce trade for two more years.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said it is a "good outcome and we are completely satisfied".

He said that a lot of issues continue to make progress in terms of discussions.

"Progress was made on several contentious issues which have not been closed for many years but forward movement is always a sign of possible closure going forward," he told reporters here.

India successfully pushed the food security issue and the country did not yield any ground on protecting the interest of poor farmers and fishermen as well as on other issues.

Despite the four days of hectic parleys getting extended for a day, the 166-member World Trade Organisation (WTO) was not able to reach a common ground for resolving the food security issue, a demand raised prominently by India as it was crucial for the livelihood of 800 million people across the globe, and curbing subsidies that leads to overfishing and over capacity.

New Delhi was pressing for a permanent solution to the issue of public stock holding (PSH) of grains for food security programmes and has asked developed countries engaged in distant water fishing to stop providing any kind of subsidies for 25 years.

Experts said that there should not be any comparison between the fishermen of rich nations and those of developing countries. In one of the developed countries, the fisheries subsidies is over USD 80,000 per fisherman, while in India it is about USD 38 per fisherman.

India and South Africa also blocked a proposal led by China on investment facilitation stating that the agenda is out of the WTO mandate. India has also blocked a proposal of the European Union on industrial policy.

- India, South Africa blocked a proposal led by China on investment facilitation stating that the agenda is out of the WTO mandate.India has also blocked a proposal of the European Union on industrial policy

As part of a permanent solution, India has asked for measures like amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap.

Developing nations including India were asking for updating the external reference prices used to calculate market price support in public stockholding, which are currently based on 1986-88 reference prices.India also successfully managed to keep non-trade issues out of the agenda.

—PTI

Boeing in talks to buy Spirit AeroSystems, key supplier on the troubled 737 Max

DALLAS, 2 MARCH

Boeing spun off Spirit in 2005 as part of a strategy to outsource supply chain for its commercial planes ***PHOTO: X***

Boeing is in talks to buy Spirit AeroSystems, which builds fuselages for Boeing 737 Max jetliners, including the one that suffered a door-panel blowout in January, according to a person knowledgeable about the discussions.

The timing of a deal — or whether the two sides even reach a final agreement — is uncertain, according to the person, who spoke about the private talks on condition of anonymity.The Wall Street Journal first reported the talks. The newspaper said Friday that Spirit hired bankers to consider strategic options and has held preliminary discussions about a sale back to Boeing, its former owner.

Boeing and Spirit AeroSystems declined to comment.Shares of Spirit jumped 15 per cent in afternoon trading.A deal could help Boeing respond to critics who have blamed the company's manufacturing problems in large part on outsourcing key work to Spirit and other suppliers.

Boeing spun off Spirit in 2005 as part of a strategy to outsource the supply chain for its commercial planes. In recent years, quality problems have mounted at Spirit, including fuselage panels that didn't fit together precisely enough and holes that were improperly drilled. Those and other flaws held up deliveries of Boeing 737s and 787s.

Spirit removed its CEO in October and replaced him with Patrick Shanahan, a former Boeing executive who served as acting defense secretary in the Trump administration.

Scrutiny of Spirit — which is not related to Spirit Airlines — grew even stronger after an emergency door plug that it made blew off an Alaska Airlines 737 Max 9 over Oregon on 5 January.

Investigators said the panel had been removed at a Boeing factory to let Spirit workers fix damaged rivets, and bolts that help hold the panel in place were missing after the repair job. It is not clear who removed the bolts and failed to put them back.

—AP

There are more than 1,500 urban cooperative banks with 11,000 branches and a deposit of Rs 5 lakh cr across the country ***PHOTO: PTI***

Amit Shah backs setting one bank in each town

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday launched the National Urban Cooperative Finance and Development Corporation (NUCFDC) and asked the umbrella body to set up one urban cooperative bank in each town.

NUCFDC has received the RBI approval to function as a non-banking finance company and a self-regulatory organisation for the urban cooperative banking sector. After the launch, Shah said, "After 20 years, NUCFDC has been established. This is the need of the hour. I am happy the RBI has given approval for this." Urban cooperative banks have been operating in India for a long time, but could not grow rapidly even though they can play a key role in the country's economic growth, he said.

The main objective of NUCFDC should be to help urban cooperative banks adhere to the Banking Regulations Act and bring professionalism in their work, the Minister said.

There are more than 1,500 urban cooperative banks with 11,000 branches and a deposit of Rs 5 lakh crore across the country, he added. Minister of State for Cooperation BLVerma, Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat KishanraoKarad, Cooperation Secretary Ashish Bhutani, and NUCFDC Chairman Jyotindra Mehta were present at the event. *—PTI*

JSW Steel to invest 143 million euros in Italy

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

JSW Steel said it will make investments to the tune of 143 million euros at its steelworks site at Piombino in Italy.

Apart from doubling the current rail-making capacity from three lakh tonnes to six lakh tonnes per annum, the investments at Piombino are aimed at making the rail mill more efficient, modern and technologically advanced.

The project envisages the setting up of the Tandem Mill, a head-hardening facility and increasing the length of the rails from 108 to 120 metres.

—PTI

Byju's unable to pay salaries to workers

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Byju Raveendran ***PHOTO: X***

Byju's Founder Byju Raveendran on Saturday said the edtech company will not be able to pay salaries to employees as the recent funds raised through a rights issue are inaccessible due to a legal dispute with certain investors.

In a letter to staff, Raveendran said the rights issue, launched a month ago, has been successfully closed.

Raveendran said the company is still striving to ensure that salaries are paid by 10 March.

"Four out of our 150 plus investors have stooped to a heartless level, ensuring that we are unable to utilise the funds raised to pay your salaries," Raveendran said.

Raveendran accused these select investors of having a callous disregard for the lives and livelihoods of others even though they had reaped substantial profits from investment in Byju's.

Earlier this week, a court had asked Byju's to consider extending the closing date of the USD 200 million rights issue, a request that the management had hinted it would not accept even as estranged investors flagged technicalities that prevented the closure of the issue.

In an interim order dated 27 February, National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Bengaluru Bench said the funds received by the company in respect to the rights issue should be kept in a separate escrow account, and it should not be withdrawn till the disposal of the matter.

The next hearing is on 4 April.

The investors in Byju's alleged that the edtech giant siphoned off USD 533 million in an obscure hedge fund in the US and had sought a stay on a USD 200 million rights issue, calling it illegal.

Last month, Byju's shareholders voted for removing Founder-CEO Raveendran and his family from the board over alleged "mismanagement and failures" but the company hit back calling the voting done in the absence of founders as invalid and ineffective.

—PTI

Paytm shares decline 2.50% after FIU slaps fine

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns and operates Paytm, declined more than 2.50 per cent in Saturday's special trading session, after the Financial Intelligence Unit(FIU) slapped a penalty of Rs 5.49 crore on Paytm Payments Bank.

The company's stock fell by 2.56 per cent to settle at Rs 414.55 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it went lower by 3.61 per cent to Rs 410.05.

In fresh trouble for Paytm Payments Bank, FIU has slapped a penalty of Rs 5.49 crore on the payments bank for violating anti-money laundering law. *—PTI*

SERVICE FEE ROW

Ashwini Vaishnaw said the startup ecosystem is key to the Indian economy and their fate cannot be left to any big tech to decide ***PHOTO: PTI***

Google restores Indian apps after rap from Centre

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Google has reinstated some popular Indian apps it had removed from its Play Store, including Naukri and 99acres, amid the government's clear signal that the delisting of Indian apps cannot be permitted.

Sources said reinstating some of the apps was not linked to the government's position but with the concerned apps complying with the Play Store Billing policies.

Info Edge founder Sanjeev Bikhchandani, in on X, confirmed that many Info Edge apps are now back in the app marketplace.

"Many of the Info Edge apps are back on the Play Store. An effort very well led by (company MD and CEO) Hitesh and the entire Info Edge team. People were up all night for this. Great crisis management," he said.

Taking a strong view of Google pulling out some apps from its Play Store, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told PTI that the delisting of Indian apps cannot be permitted and that the tech company and startups concerned have been called for a meeting next week.

IT and Telecom Minister Vaishnaw said the startup ecosystem is key to the Indian economy and their fate cannot be left to any big tech to decide.

The minister's comments assume significance as Google on Friday began removing some apps, over a dispute on service fee payments, even as apps and well-known startup founders cried foul.

Taking a serious note of the issue, Vaishnaw said: "India is very clear, our policy is very clear...our startups will get the protection that they need".

The minister said the government will meet Google and app developers, who have been delisted, next week to resolve the dispute.

"I have already called Google...I have already called the app developers, who have been delisted. We will be meeting them next week. This cannot be permitted...This kind of delisting cannot be permitted," Vaishnaw asserted. *—PTI*

As a result of better connectivity, savings of more than USD 82 million within next six years are expected ***PHOTO: ANI***

$452M for improving connectivity in Assam

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

World Bank has approved a new program to improve connectivity for over 1.8 million people living in rural areas, especially during extreme weather in the state of Assam.

Assam is the gateway to Southeast Asia and South Asian markets. With its abundant natural resources like tea and spices, Assam has the potential to leapfrog to the next level of competitiveness in the global value chain.

However, it is frequently exposed to climate events such as floods, cyclones, and landslides. Currently, smallholder farmer communities and tribal settlements are not well connected to all-season bridges and roads, and this affects their lives and livelihoods.

According to a World Bank release, the USD 452 million Assam Resilient Rural Bridges Program is aimed at strengthening the resilience and management of roads and bridges to help people living in 1,739 villages gain round-the-year access to wholesale markets, schools, hospitals, and places of work.

As a result of better connectivity, savings of more than USD 82 million within the next six years are expected against the earlier costs, the release said.

The Program will also connect almost 633,000 women-led textile and handicraft producers living within 2 km of roads or collection points.

"The Program will support the Government of Assam to attract private investment for quality jobs, increase farmers' incomes and enhance value chains thus promoting inclusive and diversified growth in the rural sector," said AugusteTanoKouame, the World Bank's Country Director for India.

The Program will help to strengthen the Assam Public Works Roads Department's financial and procurement processes using the state's own systems and provide training to improve disaster risk management.

"In addition, it will help increase women's participation by almost 20 per cent in jobs related to bridge design, construction and maintenance, as well as operating digital platforms at rural transportation hubs," said TesfamichaelMitiku, AnupKaranth, and BKM Ashraful Islam, the Task Team Leaders for the Program.

—ANI

HELPING CREATORS, BRANDS

Threads says it will make its API broadly available by June

CALIFORNIA, 2 MARCH

Over the years, social networks have increased restrictions around access to user data for developers ***PHOTO: X***

Meta-owned social network Threads said that it will make its API broadly available to developers by June.

Engineer Jesse Chen posted that the company has been building the API for the past few months. The API currently allows users to authenticate, publish threads and fetch the content they post through these tools.

"Over the past few months, we've been building the Threads API to enable creators, developers, and brands to manage their Threads presence at scale and easily share fresh, new ideas with their communities from their favorite third-party applications," he said.

Chen added that the company is working with a limited number of partners, including social tools like Sprinklr, Sprout Social, Social News Desk, Hootsuite, tech news board Techmeme and a few other developers.

The engineer added that Threads is looking to add more capabilities to APIs for moderation and insights gathering.

Last October, Instagram head Adam Mosseri first confirmed that the social platform is working on an API to enable third-party experiences. At that time Chen had added that the company would start working on a content publishing endpoint. While the social network has added new capabilities to the API, it's not clear if this will allow developers to build third-party clients to create a different way to experience Threads.

- Decentralized social networks such as Bluesky and Mastodon have allowed developers to create new apps June

Over the years, social networks have increased restrictions around access to user data for developers. This has stifled the third-party app ecosystem built for social platforms.

Decentralized social networks such as Bluesky and Mastodon have allowed developers to create new apps. However, they have yet to reach the massive scale of the likes of Twitter/X, Reddit and Meta's properties like Facebook and Instagram.

While Meta has committed to adopting ActivityPub protocol for Threads and joining the fediverse, the company hasn't spoken openly about allowing developers to build alternative Threads clients.

—Courtesy, TechCrunch

PHOTO: IANS

Ankita exits singles but wins doubles crown with Zhibek

GURUGRAM, 2 MAR

Home favorite Ankita Raina copped a straight-set semifinal defeat to unseeded Yeonwoo Ku in the singles event of the ITF Women's Open but grabbed the doubles title with Kazakh partner Zhibek Kulambayeva, here on Saturday.Ankita, India's number one singles player, lost 6-7 (4) 3-6 to her Korean rival in the last-four stage match.Also exiting was the top seed from Slovenia Dalila Jakupovic, who was undone by third seed Justina Mikulskyte of Lithuania 4-6 2-6 7-6 (0). Later, Ankita joined hands with Kulambayeva to brush aside the challenge of Jacqueline Cabaj Awad of Sweden and Justina Mikulskyte 6-4 6-2. Results:Singles semifinals:Yeonwoo Ku (KOR) bt 2-Ankita Raina 7-6 (4), 6-3;3-Justina Mikulskyte (LTU) bt 1-Dalila Jakupovic (SLO) 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (0) Doubles Final1-Zhibek Kulambayeva (KAZ)/Ankita Raina bt Jacqueline Cabaj Awad (SWE)/Justina (LTU) 6-4, 6-2.—*AP*

Indian trio draws on a dull day in Prague Masters

PRAGUE, 2 MAR

The Indian trio of R Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh, and Vidit Gujrathi played out draws on a dull fourth-round day in the Prague Masters Chess tournament here.It was time for some recovery for Praggnanandhaa after two back-to-back losses and the Indian just played a solid game to sign peace with local hopeful Nguyen Thai Dai Van.Gukesh did not give any chances to Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan and split the point while Gujrathi could not make much headway against Mateusz Bartel of Poland.The day witnessed no decisive games as the remaining two were also drawn.—*AP*

PHOTO: IANS

Mexican Open: Minaur advances to the final

ACAPULCO, 2 MAR

Defending champion Alex de Minaur advanced to the final of the Mexican Open when Jack Draper retired in the third set Friday.The third-seeded Australian won the first set 6-3, dropped the second 6-2, and was leading 4-0 in the third when Draper, who was visibly diminished physically, called it quits.De Minaur will face Casper Ruud, who pulled off an upset by beating second-seeded Holger Rune 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the late match.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

AIFF's legal head accuses Chaubey of corruption

NEW DELHI, 2 MAR

All India Football Federation's (AIFF) Principal legal advisor Nilanjan Bhattacharjee on Saturday made serious "corruption allegations" against president Kalyan Chaubey, who termed them baseless and said he would take legal action.In a letter written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bhattacharjee said Chaubey worked out "corruption avenues" through nontransparent tender process and preferential allotment of tender.—*PTI*

Avesh takes 4 as Vidarbha collapses for 170

Deshpande, Thakur shine as Mumbai takes opening day honors

NAGPUR, 2 MAR

Avesh Khan-led Madhya Pradesh pace bowling unit hit the right lengths on a pitch that offered enough carry to bowl out Vidarbha for a meager 170 on day one to gain control of their Ranji Trophy semifinal match here on Saturday.

Avesh (4/49) was the pick of MP bowlers while receiving good support from Kulwant Khejroliya (2/38) and Venkatesh Iyer (2/28).Madhya Pradesh reached 47 for one in their first innings at close, and trail by 123 runs.

The VCA Stadium deck wore such a fine green tinge as MP employed spin for just 2.4 overs in a total of 56.4 overs they bowled on the day.Left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya, who dismissed the last man, Umesh Yadav, did the spinner's duty for a brief period.Other spinners in their ranks like offie Saransh Jain remained spectators of the proceedings. Vidarbha's feeble fight came through Karun Nair, who made 63 (105 balls, 9x4).India pacer Avesh gave MP a fine start to the match when he uprooted the stumps of opener Dhruv Shorey (13).

Vidarbha lost wickets at regular intervals from that point and their biggest partnership was a 36 between Atharva Taide (39, 63b, 8x4) and Aman Mokhade (13, 75 balls) for the second wicket.

Avesh Khan celebrates dismissing Dhruv Shorey PHOTO: PTI

The Mumbai team celebrates after the fall of a wicket during the Ranji trophy semifinals against Tamil Nadu PHOTO: PTI

It came in almost 16 overs but the home side failed to capitalise on all the hard work.Taide, who made a gritty hundred against Karnataka in the quarterfinals, snicked Iyer to stumper Himanshu Mantri who took a lovely tumbling catch behind the first slip.

But the right-hander did not find support from the other end as Avesh dismissed a stubborn Mokhade.

Tushar Deshpande (3/24) and Shardul Thakur (2/48) starred with the ball to put Mumbai on top following a meek display from Tamil Nadu on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Saturday.Tamil Nadu skipper B Sai Kishore's decision to bat first backfired as the visitors were shot out for a mere 146 in the first innings with Deshpande and Thakur making life miserable for the visiting batters at the BKC Ground.

If it was any consolation, Tamil Nadu struck twice with the ball but Mumbai shaved off a significant chunk of the first-innings deficit, reaching 45/2 at stumps to trail by another 101 runs.Musheer Khan (24 not out) and night-watchman Mohit Avasthi (1) were at the crease with Mumbai losing openers Prithvi Shaw (5) and Bhupen Lalwani (15).Shaw fell early against Kuldeep Sen while Sai Kishore trapped Lalwani for the second wicket, but Mumbai remained on top. On a track that had movement off the surface as well as turn for spinners, Mumbai proved to be the superior side given their bowlers extracted more support and their batters did not find getting runs as tough as the visitors. Tamil Nadu, shellshocked by a disastrous start to their first semifinal in seven yearsBrief scores: Tamil Nadu 146 in 64.1 overs (Vijay Shankar 44, Washington Sundar 43; Shardul Thakur 2/48, Tushar Deshpande 3/24, Tanush Kotian 2/10) lead Mumbai 45/2 in 17 overs (Bhupen Lalwani 15, Musheer Khan 24*; Kuldeep Sen 1/25, SaiK Kishore 1/3) by 101 runs.

—*PTI*

Phillips, Ravindra launch Kiwis fightback on Day 3 as hosts stay in hunt to clinch Wellington Test PHOTO: TWITTER

Rachin Ravindra holds fort for New Zealand

WELLINGTON, 2 MAR

Part-time off-spinner Glenn Phillips took 5-45 as New Zealand bowled out Australia for 164 in its second innings Saturday on the third day of the first cricket test.

Phillips' maiden five-wicket total comprised the wickets of Usman Khawaja (28), first-innings century-maker Cameron Green (34), Travis Head (29), Mitch Marsh for a first-ball duck and Alex Carey (3). Matt Henry took 3-36 as Australia was bowled in less than four hours.

Australia still increased its overall lead to 368 after leading by 204 in the first innings. At stumps, New Zealand was 111-3 and 257 runs behind.

Rachin Ravindra reached a half-century from 77 balls just before stumps and was 56 not out at the close of play and Daryl Mitchell was 12.

Australia struck a major blow when it dismissed Kane Williamson for 9 in the last session. Williamson fell to Nathan Lyon, the off-spinner who likely holds the key to the match.

After being run out for 0 in the first innings, Williamson was caught by Steve Smith at leg slip from a ball that bounced more than he expected. Smith moved to first slip and caught Will Young (15) off Head as New Zealand's hopes of winning began to melt away.

Ravindra revived those hopes a little before stumps with his first half-century in his first match against Australia. The only previous time he passed 50 in his test career, he made 240.

A New Zealand win remained unlikely and of the three possible results still in play an Australia win is most probable. A draw also looms as a possibility as rain is forecast for most of the fourth day.

New Zealand's highest successful fourth-innings run chase in New Zealand is 324 and the current target would represent the 10th-highest successful chase in the history of test cricket. Still, Phillips' incredible contribution in the middle session when four of his five wickets fell helped save some face for New Zealand after it was bowled out for 179 in reply to Australia's 383.

New Zealand 179 and 111 for 3 (Ravindra 56*, Mitchell 12*) need 258 more runs to beat Australia 383 and 164 (Lyon 41, Phillips 5-45, Henry 3-36).

—*AP*

Aaron Mare PHOTO: X

Aaron Mare wins Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge

ABU DHABI, 2 FEB

Rally GP class rider Aaron Mare's stellar performance helped Hero Moto Corp win the 33rd Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, wins stage 2 marking the team's maiden win in a World Championship race after their historic Dakar Rally podium finish in January.

Aaron clinched the top spot for Hero MotoSports, delivering an impressive performance throughout the 6-day desert rally.

Despite stepping in as a substitute for the recovering Sebastian Buhler, Aaron won two stages and led the race for four consecutive days en route to his triumph.

Collecting several points from the round win, Hero MotoSports now leads the manufacturers' standings in the FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) 2024.

This is the first time an Indian manufacturer has reached this level on a global stage.

The team's second factory rider, Ross Branch, finished just outside the podium, in fourth place.

By finishing second in the Rally GP class at this second race of the season, Ross has raised his total points to 50, making himself the leader of the World Rally -Raid Championship 2024 – another first for Team Hero MotoSports.

—*AP*

Mumbai pummel RCB by 7 wickets

BENGALURU, 2 MAR

Mumbai Indians batters and bowlers functioned in perfect sync to power their side to a seven-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bangalore in their Women's Premier League match here on Saturday.

Yastika Bhatia (31, 15 balls, 4x4, 2x6) and Hayley Matthews (26, 21b, 3x4, 1x6) added 45 runs for the first wicket in just 3.5 overs to give a sound launching pad to MI.

The subsequent batters exploited the strong start to register a fine win, reaching the 132-run target with 29 balls to spare to take them to the top of the table with six points.

The MI bowlers were efficient while restricting RCB to a timid 131 for six.

Bhatia gave a fiery start to the Mumbai chase as she began with a boundary off pacer Renuka Singh in the first ball. The introduction of Sophie Molineux prompted her to take aggression to the next level.

The left-hander smashed the left-arm spinner over the deep mid-wicket for a six and then carted her past point for a four.

However, Bhatia was not all power as she showed a delectable touch too, like a flowing backfoot punch off Sophie Devine.

Mumbai Indians' Amelia Kerr and Pooja Vastrakar celebrate after winning PHOTO: PTI

But Devine had the last laugh as Bhatia's drive away from her body was snaffled by stumper Richa Ghosh diving to her left.

Matthews, who thumped a six off Georgia Wareham over mid-wicket, perished when she drilled an uppish drive straight to Smriti Mandhana off off-spinner Shreyanka Patil.

MI needed 63 runs from that point but stand-in captain Nat-Sciver Brunt (27, 25 balls) and Amelia Kerr (40 not out, 27 balls) hardly broke a sweat while adding 49 runs for the third wicket through a medley of pulls, reverse sweeps and late cuts.

From there, it was easy for MI to come home.

Earlier, RCB would have been in deeper trouble had Elysse Perry (44 not out, 38 balls, 5x4) and Wareham (27, 20b, 3x4) not added 52 runs for the sixth wicket after MI decided to bowl first.

Mumbai were without their regular skipper Harmanpreet Kaur and premier pacer Shabnim Ismail, who have been nursing injuries, for the second match on the trot, but that did not affect their intensity.

Mumbai Indians 133 for 3 (Kerr 40*, Bhatia 31, Patil 1-15) beat Royal Challengers Bangalore 131 for 6 (Perry 44*, Wareham 27, Vastrakar 2-14, Sciver-Brunt 2-27) by seven wickets. —*PTI*

Indian boxers renew quest for Paris Olympic

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The seasoned Shiva Thapa, Deepak Bhoria, and Nishant Dev will be among nine Indian boxers fighting it out for Paris Olympic berths at the 1st World Qualification Tournament, starting in Busto Arsizio, Italy on Sunday.

Seven men and two women from India will be aiming to secure Olympic berths at the qualifiers being conducted by the Paris 2024 Boxing Unit (PBU), an ad-hoc body created by the International Olympic Committee Executive Board.

The tournament has 49 quota places on offer and a boxer will be assured of a Paris ticket after reaching the semifinals.

In the women's 60kg category, however, there will be a box-off between the losing semifinalists to decide the Olympic berths as only three spots are available.

While several boxers have already obtained quota places via their respective continental events, there are many world-class pugilists including Colombia's Yuberjen Martinez and Tomoya Tsuboi of Japan in the men's 51kg, who will be keen to seal the deal in Italy this month. —*AP*

Pacer Deepak Chahar, who will be eyeing a national comeback PHOTO: PTI

CSK training camp ahead of IPL 2024 gets underway

CHENNAI, 2 MAR

Chennai Super Kings' pre-season camp got underway here on Saturday in the presence of pacer Deepak Chahar, who will be eyeing a national comeback through a consistent run for his franchise in the IPL beginning 22 March.

"The first batch of local (Indian) players arrived on Friday and more are expected to arrive in the coming days," a Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) official told PTI.

On Friday, CSK confirmed the arrival of the first batch of players in the city and they included Simarjeet Singh (pacer), Rajvardhan Hangargekar (all-rounder), Mukesh Choudhary (pacer), Prashant Solanki (spinner), Ajay Mandal (all-rounder) and Deepak Chahar (seamer).

Notably, Chahar has not played any form of cricket since last December when he pulled out of the T20 series against Australia midway before skipping the tour of South Africa due to his father's illness.

However, he declared himself fully fit last month while training at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru. The injury-prone pacer is eyeing a comeback to the national side for the T20 World Cup scheduled in the Caribbean and the USA in June.

Fan-favourite and team skipper MS Dhoni's arrival is yet to be confirmed. He was spotted with his wife Sakshi in Jamnagar on Friday when he attended the pre-wedding function of Anant Ambani, the youngest son of Indian business tycoon Mukesh Ambani. CSK opens their IPL 2024 campaign versus Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) here on 22 March. —*PTI*

In-form Humbert eases past Bublik to capture Dubai title

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

Fifth seed Ugo Humbert produced a near-flawless performance to outclass Kazakh Alexander Bublik 6-4 6-3 and capture the Dubai Tennis Championships title on Saturday for his second trophy this season.

The in-form Marseille champion edged a tight opening set when seventh seed Bublik fired a double fault in the 10th game as he chanced his arm and attempted a big second serve in a desperate attempt to hold. He unleashed a monster forehand to go 5-2 up before holding his nerve two games later to save a breakpoint and close out the contest on his second championship point with a passing winner. He adds to titles in 2020 in Auckland and Antwerp as well as Halle in 2021, but it has been as of late where has had a purple patch winning in Metz, Marseille, and Dubai since last November. Bublik failed to create an early advantage in the match and Humbert was there to pounce. After a closely fought opening set, Humbert sealed a late break to claim it 6-4.

Ugo Humbert PHOTO: AFP

Left-hander Humbert, who took out top seed and Australian Open runner-up Daniil Medvedev in the semi-final, showcased his superb defensive skills. —*AP*

AIFF women's committee discusses appointment of new coaches

MUMBAI, 2 MAR

The All India Football Federation's (AIFF) women's committee on Saturday held discussions regarding the appointment of new coaches for national teams and recruitment of more 'A' and 'B' License coaches.In recent times, the country finished joint-winner in the SAFF U19 Women's Championship in Dhaka. Immediately after that, the senior team secured the runner-up position in the Turkish Women's Cup.The U-16 women's team is currently playing in the SAFF Championship and won the first match comfortably."The women's senior national team didn't have the opportunity to get international exposure for many months. There are plans to give the team more frequent exposure shortly," said acting Secretary General Satyanarayan."In light of these achievements and with various international competitions underway, the 'Khelo India' Women's Football League continues to serve as a beacon of progress."It offers a crucial platform for aspiring women footballers to unlock their potential and play an important role in fostering the growth of the sport throughout the nation."The committee analyzed the performances of the various women's national teams and deliberated upon the discussions going on with the sport's world governing body. —*PTI*

SPANISH LEAGUE

Almeria loses to Celta Vigo

MADRID, 2 MAR

Almeria's record winless run hit 30 games after a late goal from Óscar Mingueza gave fellow relegation candidate Celta Vigo a 1-0 win in Galicia in the Spanish league on Friday.

Mingueza struck with a superb low shot from around 30 meters out in the 72nd minute, seven minutes after Almeria's Bruno Langa was issued a straight red card for a foul on Jonathan Bamba.

Almeria's record winless run hit 30 games after a late goal from Óscar Mingueza PHOTO: AFP

- Almeria's record winless run hit 30 games after a late goal from Óscar Mingueza gave fellow relegation candidate Celta Vigo a 1-0 win in Galicia in the Spanish league on Friday.

Almeria remained at the bottom of the table. Its record so far this season read won none, drawn nine, lost 18.

"We are sad and hurting, that was a vital match," midfielder Sergio Arribas said. "It was a final to get back on track and get out of relegation. Although (the situation) is very difficult, we are going to fight to the very end."

The three points were vital for Celta in its bid to avoid the drop. The win lifted Rafael Benitez's men one spot into 16th, six points above the relegation zone. —*AP*